

PART III

CHAPTER XXI

IN Rupert Street, East London, are situate the model dwellings which practically pioneered the movement for better poor-housing in the metropolis. Of the flats contained in the buildings, that on the ground floor of Block A was an easy first in the matter of its appointments; the numerous signs of comfort and refinement showed at a glance that the occupant had taken up his abode amid the squalid surroundings more from choice than necessity. The occupant was Phil. He was sitting, this November evening, gazing pensively into the fire; he had done so for the last half-hour. At last he yawned, stretched himself, and looked at his watch.

"By Jove, only six o'clock," he said to himself. "Another hour to kill before I take my classes. But how?"

He reflected for a moment, and his face lit up. "That's it—let us read in the Book of Chronicles." He went to his writing desk, unlocked it, and produced a number of diary volumes. He opened that marked One, and looked at the date of the first entry.

"Goodness me," he mused, with a start; "eight years and more since I went up to Cambridge! And if so, will somebody please tell me what has become of those

eight years? But I suppose diary will know. So here goes."

He turned a page or two, and then his glance fell on an entry, and he smiled.

"October 10th," he read. "My first adventure up here. Was saying my morning prayers when Mrs. Hall, the bedmaker, glides in—she always glides—to lay breakfast. She sees the phylactery strips round my head and arms, gives a yell, and does considerably more than glide out. For a moment, I am as startled as she, till I recollect. I finish prayers, and go to her and explain. She was not surprised to hear I was a Jew; in fact, she admitted she always thought I was a heathen of some sort, because I was not required to keep chapels. As to the incident this morning, her first impression had been—as I am informed by Broughton, who keeps on my staircase—that the poor young gentleman had gone balmy, and was playing at gee-gee with himself."

"Oct. 12th. On coming home this evening find my rooms badly 'ragged.' Sit down there and then, and pour out the vials of my wrath in verse. Take the thing down to the porter's lodge and pin it to notice-board."

"Oct. 13th. Porter's lodge besieged all day by men reading my skit. Among them Edwards, who edits 'Cantabrian.' Comes to my rooms for permission to let it go into next number. Give it, of course."

"Oct. 15th. 'The Ragers' has caught on. Everybody talking about it. Overhead in the reading-room of the 'Union' and elsewhere: 'Who is this P. L.-D?' 'Young cub of a Trinity Fresher, I understand.' 'Jove, isn't he a corker?' 'Rippingest

thing since Calverly.' 'Take jolly good care not to tread on his corns,' etc., etc. In the evening the 'Raggers' come in a body to offer apologies. Insist on my accepting a case of whiskey in exchange for the bottle they smashed. I insist on their staying to sample it. A merry evening."

"Oct. 20th. Make my first speech at the 'Union.' Sit down on reaching time-limit. House yells at me to get up and resume. Do so, and for the joke of the thing pulverize my own arguments. Am making more acquaintances than I shall know what to do with."

"Oct. 24th. To-day was my third Saturday up here. All day I felt ill at ease, uncomfortable—much more so than I had done on each of the two previous Saturdays. In my heart there was a sense of something lacking. After lunch I went out for a walk, refusing several offers of company. I wanted solitude to puzzle the thing out. Succeeded. I was discontented, because, save for an additional prayer or two, I had let the Sabbath go without some distinctive mark upon it—had let it get lost in the crowding routine of the week. The evil having been discovered, the remedy required no searching. I am not accustomed to praying alone on the Sabbath; my thoughts seemed to have taken to themselves a voice that cried in the wilderness. I miss the inspiring contact of the congregation. Why should there be no congregation here? I hurry home and glance down the list of University residents; it contains scores of names with a Jewish ring—ample material for achieving my project. To-morrow is Sunday—the conventional visiting day. I determine to set at defiance the stiff aca-

demic etiquette, which does not permit the first-year man to call on his seniors without having been called on first, and make a round of personal calls."

"Oct. 25th. A most fatiguing day; climbed more staircases than would cover the distance to the top of Snowdon. Result, on the whole, satisfactory. A tremendous disappointment met me at the outset. My first half-a-dozen calls convinced me of what I had lost sight of in my eagerness, that a large percentage of Jewish-looking names belonged to Welshmen. One of them, the captain of the 'Rugger' football team, pointed this fact out to me with more than necessary emphasis of diction. Another was the secretary of the 'Varsity' branch of the Young Men's Christian Association. He gave me a hearty welcome, guessing in me a recruit. After the first shock of the surprise on hearing of my errand, he redoubled his cordiality. He said it was the finger of God which had guided me there—the straying sheep to the fold. I controverted him with the earnestness of conviction which his own sincerity deserved. A fine, manly fellow. The almost pathetic look he gave me as I declined his invitation to attend their service that evening touched me to the heart. Then I had four strokes of good fortune in rapid succession. In each case I found a coreligionist eager to give his co-operation to the scheme. None of them, I found, conform to the outward observances of our faith, but their racial emotions are clamoring for expression; for the time being I felt like an apostle. I convened them, with two others I came across later on, to my rooms this evening, and the Cambridge Hebrew Congregation has been founded. With the addition of three of the towns-

people whom I know to be Jews, we shall make up the necessary quorum of ten. The service will be held in my rooms for the present, and we have subscribed for the purchase of a Scroll of the Law for the reading of the Sabbath portion."

Phil turned several pages before his eyes halted on another entry. "Nov. 20th," he read. "A most welcome surprise this morning—a letter from Leuw direct to me. The post-mark is Cape Town. He writes little, only just that he is well, and is going further up country. Good luck go with him."

"Jan. 30th. Have just been told officially that I have won the 'Craven.' Robinson, my tutor, had said long before the exam. that it was a certainty for me; I half believed him myself. I am so used to having things my own way that I am longing for a defeat to save me from getting *blasé*. To get the 'Craven,' the blue riband of classical distinctions open to the whole 'Varsity,' in my first year! True, the thing is not without precedent, but still . . . Hang it, I wish I could get somebody to kick me hard. It's simply abominable, this cold-blooded complacency of mine. Phil, you're found out. You're a humbug. The quiet humility on which you pride yourself is all a sham—is worse than the most bouncing, but frank, conceit. On my honor, the next time I catch you developing prig symptoms, I'll take all your trophies and make a bonfire of them."

Phil paused with his finger on the page, and smiled to himself a little. How easily he had allowed himself to get ruffled in those days! He took things more calmly now; that was because he knew himself better, and could argue out the phenomena of his disposition

more rationally. He no longer mistook honest exultation over things honestly achieved for blatant self-glorifying. And as for priggishness, he knew the difference between an obtrusive mock modesty and outspoken self-respect. If only the people of his race had seen these things more clearly, they might have saved themselves much humiliation.

He turned more pages and yet more. It was not the first time he had read in his "Book of Chronicles," and he knew his favorite places. He was coming to one that was very dear to him.

"June 7th. May Week is in full swing; it is called 'May Week' because it never falls earlier than June. According to long-standing arrangement, Aunt, Dulcie, and Effie came up for it. Mother would not join them; but even if I use force, she will have to come to see me take my award on prize-day at the Senate House. Talking of which—Broughton has still not got over his surprise that he beat me for the Chancellor's Verse Medal. He read my doggerel before it was to be sent in, and said he was not going to make a fool of himself. He was awfully disappointed; he had so set his heart on getting the 'pot.' With real difficulty I persuaded him to let his poem go in. Mine came back—unread of course, because I happened to exceed time for sending in by one day; it was very careless of me. But this is a digression. We are having a high old time of it. The weather is glorious; our first boat went up a place last 'night.' Effie—I mean the girls, are creating a sensation wherever they are seen. They set each other off splendidly. Dulcie, with her sweet, delicate face, gives one an impression of gossamer and butterflies. Effie? That

note of interrogation means everything. I don't know what to say of her. Let's try, though. What a proud strong face she is getting! what a carriage! She steps along like a princess on the way to her kingdom. I almost feel sorry for the people she looks at; they must get an idea of what it is like to be struck by lightning. And her utter want of self-consciousness. She seems too proud to be proud of herself; I make up for her. What a swagger I am growing. I dare not show myself alone, because I am straightway mobbed with requests for introductions. Are they coming to the College dance to-morrow night? I don't know—they are so young, you see. Whereupon an immediate suggestion to despatch a deputation to Aunt. I know the dare-devils are capable of everything, especially in the May Week; and so, to save Aunt from the invasion, I promise solemnly to use my influence with her.

“A change has come into the relations between Effie and myself—a change which, on the one hand, makes us strangely distant, and, on the other, draws us more nearly together. It seems to me that whenever we look at each other, we ought to put our forefinger to our lips. I feel sort of guilty. It seems unfair to Aunt. There—hang my squeamishness. What's up? What's wrong? A girl and a boy get chummy together, and they don't care about shouting the thing out from the house tops. I never saw such a fellow for making his own troubles.”

Again Phil paused—this time with such a tense air of thoughtfulness as though every fibre of his brain were strung tight. It was more than seven years since he had penned the above; and now—what post-

script had he to add? None. Effie and he were still chums. Their dealings with each other showed no implication of anything more—no half-revealed afterthought. The progress of the years had tempered it with a mature sympathy, had given to it the security of a full, mutual understanding. That was all. But was it all? Phil's look became tenser. He was standing face to face with himself; where was the need for prevarication? No, his heart had not kept within the range of a mere camaraderie; it had strained further afield. But he had a sure tether for its rebellious leap—the haunting sense of disloyalty to the woman to whom he owed so much, nay, everything. Not that he would dishonor her by the suspicion of a narrow jealousy at finding out that his fealty to her was to be made secondary to his allegiance to another; she had always been so generous, so loving-kind, that he dared not even look upon his self-abnegation as an act of requital. But be that as it might, he could not thrust the issue off much further. Day by day his feelings were crystallizing, and the surer he became of himself, the greater and more formidable grew his uncertainty of Effie. For Effie gave no sign—how could he expect it of Effie, the proud, the reticent? And, perhaps, while he was fondly hugging to himself his notion of chivalry to Mrs. Duveen, he was foolishly frittering away the great opportunity of his life, the dearest hope of his future. After all, he owed a duty to himself. . . .

Impatiently he passed his hand across his forehead as if to dash away the cobwebs behind it. It was always the same, whenever he endeavored to take counsel with himself on his dilemma—there were always

the same self-questionings ending in the same doubts and irresolution. Each time he determined that the next should bring him clearness; but the next never seemed to come. With a sigh he resumed the reading of his records, but the pages had lost their hold on his attention. Here and there his glance dwelt somewhat longer on some particular entry, making note of a letter from Leuw, some academic achievement or other—it was easy to see how his hand had trembled as it made the memorandum of his election to a Fellowship at his college. Then came pages on pages of references to his travels abroad, extending more or less over a period of two years, including a stay of six months in Germany, of the same length in Paris, and a flying visit to Russian territory, where his over-eager and incautious investigations into the condition of his coreligionists nearly landed him into prison as a spy, and necessitated an abrupt departure. After that came an entry which he read and re-read with an interest which the bald brevity of its wording hardly seemed to justify:

“Nov. 25th. Have taken up residence in Rupert Street.”

That was now two years ago. He had come there in accordance with the resolve, which, by virtue of its unflinching steadfastness of purpose, had taken to itself the sanctity of a vow. He had gone back among his people to repay, as far as he could, the debt he felt was due to them. The material advantages which had helped him on in his career had been a mere accident. But his capacity for making them bear fruit as he had done—that at least was no matter of chance. It was ingrained in him as his share of

the racial calibre, which was the inevitable outcome of a century-long combat wherein it was all thrust on the one side, and nothing but parry on the other. His share of it had been very liberal; all that had remained for him to do was to raise its level, ennoble it, in order to make it fit for the higher functions to which it was worthy of ministering. What shape and fashion his recompense was to take, he was himself yet undecided. He was there as a free-lance. He had not attached himself to any official organization, because he would not follow blindly in the beaten tracks, nor take for granted the infallibility of attempts, however much they had the prestige of precedent. He wished to see for himself; he wished to combine the somewhat blurred impressions of his youth with the clarified experience of his discreeter years and to heal with the confident touch of the physician for whom the constitution of his patient has no secret. Yet even while he was diagnosing, he would not refrain from those minor usefulnesses, which certainly would do no harm, and would, at the least, serve to keep his hand in practice till the time came for greater things. When the time came! More than once had it struck him that what to him seemed caution, might by others be construed into culpable cowardice. Well, even so. Was there not something laudable in his hesitation to take upon his shoulders a burden which, for want of support, he might have to let go crashing to the ground? It was not the possible hurt to his own vanity that he feared; but he would have it on his conscience that his failure, perhaps, might act as a bugbear disheartening others, whose superior prudence would make success more of a foregone conclusion.

Besides, he might leave ruins to be cleared away before the new start could be made, and that would waste valuable time. And so he was waiting for re-inforcements. True, he knew of many whose help would be forthcoming, and was well worth the having; but their turn would not come till later on. For the very initiative the sole ally he was wanting and waiting for was his brother Leuw.

He closed the volume, and replaced it with the others in the drawer. It was a few minutes to seven. He took up and put into his coat pocket some loose sheets of paper, closely covered with his notes for the evening's lecture—an elementary exposition of the duties of citizenship. The class-room was situated just round the corner, and consisted of a now disused workshop, which Phil had received permission to turn to his own purpose. It was here that he assembled, two evenings in the week, the score or so of lads and young men whom Phil, by personal canvass in each case, had found to be amenable to the higher recreations after the day spent at the tailor's board or over the riveter's last, and whom he hoped to make the nucleus of that larger movement which was as yet awaiting its definite shape.

The hour's spell of retrospect which Phil had indulged in had resulted in making him feel restless and unsettled. His heart was not in his work to-night; and, besides, the prospect of a long, solitary evening was not particularly alluring. Mrs. Duveen and the girls, he was aware, were going to some affair or other, and to his mother's he already had been that morning. So it was with a sense of relief that he received the information, conveyed to him through the half-open

door by the lady of the house, to the effect that a gentleman—leastways she wasn't quite sure that he was a gentleman, because he only wore a "bowler" hat—had just called to see Mr. Duveen, and he wouldn't tell his name, and he was quite positive that Mr. Duveen would know him at sight. She had shown him into the parlor, and trusted to her luck that everything would be all right.

Phil thanked her, and told her to say he would be down presently. He had no idea who his visitor might be; probably some Cambridge friend, or more likely Uncle Bram, who had once or twice before sprung this welcome surprise on him. A few minutes later he brought his lecture to a close, and having seen the class out, hurried down with a smile of ready welcome on his lips. But the smile flickered out, as on entering the room he saw himself confronted by an utter stranger. The tiny jet of gas, which the lady of the house had lit, and of which she was at that moment making a note as an "extra" to be charged for when the rent came due, showed up little more of the stranger's face than a thick, though well-groomed, black beard.

"I am afraid you have the advantage of me," stammered Phil, disappointed.

The stranger emitted a low laugh. Phil gasped, fell back a pace or two, and then started forward impetuously:

"Leuw—in Heaven's name—it isn't you?"

"I think it is, Phil," was the smiling, if tremulous, reply.

"Leuw—God, it isn't possible!"

"Why, Phil, you are taking it even worse than mother," said Leuw, his voice now very shaky.

"Oh, Leuw, I can't believe it—I can't believe . . ."

And the lady of the house, feeling naturally entitled to know what went on in her own parlor, had the shock of seeing the usually so sedate and self-possessed Mr. Duveen sobbing away for dear life on the shoulder of the stranger in the "bowler" hat.

CHAPTER XXII

A FEW minutes afterwards the two brothers were walking through the streets back to Phil's rooms. Neither of them spoke, but they clung to each other's arm, as though they had quite made up their minds never again to let go hold of each other. Silently Phil landed Leuw into the softest chair, and then went back to the door, locked it, and with a glad little laugh put the key in his pocket.

"Now you're my prisoner, and you won't get free till I've had every syllable out of you," he cried buoyantly.

"That's something like what mother said, as I walked into the house about ten minutes after you had left there," smiled Leuw. "By the way, she hopes you won't be angry with her for not letting me come sooner, or for not sending you word. She wanted to have me all to herself for a little while, the foolish woman!"

"Yes, she certainly had a right to that," said Phil half to himself. "Did she recognize you?"

"You bet she did—knew me before I stepped into the house, by my knock, she says."

"I won't ask why you didn't tell us to expect you; you wouldn't be Leuw Lipcott if you did. But now you are here, are you going to stop, or are you going back?"

"That will depend on circumstances," replied Leuw with more gravity than the question seemed to warrant.

"And now, Leuw, one more query; how have you got on? It seems strange I should have to ask it, but you will admit your letters never went much beyond saying that you were alive. However, I suppose you think you have already answered it indirectly by the allowance of twelve pounds a month you have made mother during the last five years, with the option of her drawing as much again if she found it necessary."

"Yes, Phil, I can fairly say I have fallen on my feet," was Leuw's deliberate reply.

Phil was about to speak, but, on second thoughts apparently, he only fixed his gaze steadily on Leuw's face, and kept it there.

"I know what you are thinking of," said the latter quietly.

"Do you?" exclaimed Phil eagerly.

"Perfectly, and I shall save you the effort of asking. Yes, Phil, I know there are various ways of falling on one's feet, but mine was the straight way, be assured."

"Forgive me, Leuw; one hears of strange happenings out there, and a man sometimes has to make his own opportunities. I was certain the reason that you never touched in your letters on the particular nature of your doings was not that you had anything to conceal—forgive me, Leuw. . . ."

"There is nothing to forgive," replied Leuw, laying his hand re-assuringly on Phil's. "By Jove, though, it never struck me till this minute that such a natural construction could be put on my silence. Serves me jolly well right for being such a confoundedly secretive animal. Phil, thanks for having the courage to put the matter so straight to me, and so giving me a chance to set myself right with you. If

not, there might have been a kind of a limp in our dealing with each other, and I shouldn't have been able to find the lame spot."

"There, Leuw, never mind—we have done with that."

"Oh, have we done with it?" exclaimed Leuw. "Not if I know it. I've got to make you some reparation for having given you the pain of doubting your brother. I'll tell you my yarn from beginning to end—unless you think it will weary you."

Phil's reproachfulness was simply too great for words.

"It isn't very long, and you needn't prepare yourself for anything wildly exciting," continued Leuw. "No hairbreadth 'scapes, no treasure-troves—though I must say I've had my fair share of luck. I worked, and when I saw my chance I caught hold of it, and didn't let it go till I had squeezed it dry. I got away from Cape Town as soon as I could, only just staying long enough to fix up my little caravan, and struck out across country, as I wrote you at the time. The road was good to me, and by the time I got to the mines my stock of tin pots and earthenware was gone, and my outlay had come back to me twice its size."

"And then you bought a share in a mine," hazarded Phil.

"Yes, that's the conventional idea of it," smiled Leuw; "but you know, I always had a weakness for originality. As a matter of fact, I let the mines severely alone. I gathered my five senses into a bunch, and saw that the place had in it the makings of a big town. Others had done so before me, and were merrily buying up every inch of land they could lay

hands on near the settlement. I looked on quietly, and just when the grabbing was at its height there, I went and bought up a stretch of ground about two miles off the mines—got it for a song, and even then got laughed at for a crack-brained young idiot. I let them laugh; I had figured the thing out, and started building my shanty. If there is going to be a town, I calculated, there will have to be a fashionable neighborhood to it, and that, as likely as not, will be as far off as possible from the smell, and the noise, and the riff-raff of the mine-quarter. So I waited; and in the meanwhile, just to keep myself from getting bored, I started that mineral water factory I'd been having on the brain for the last year or so, and in three months my one little machine had grown to four big ones, and I was getting troubled where I should hang the testimonial the National Temperance League would for a certainty drop down on me as soon as they got to know. Well, all the time that town wasn't idle either. I had given it five years to crawl down to where I was waiting for it; instead of which it came galloping up in three. I was ready for it; I put another two stories and a veranda to my shanty, gave it a new coat of paint, and called it an hotel. All over my spare ground the swell villas were springing up like mushrooms after the rain. And the freehold I bought for a song, well, I wouldn't sell it for a whole opera. That's all; I've shown you my bag of tricks. Very simple, isn't it, Phil?"

"As simple as the egg of Columbus," said Phil gravely. "Didn't it ever strike you that you were doing wonderful things?"

Leuw laughed. "I never found time for patting myself on the back. What about you, though?"

"What about me?" echoed Phil with suppressed vehemence. "I have crammed a few books into my head, carried off a money-prize or two, which, perhaps, some other poor beggar needed much more badly than I did. . . ."

"No, no, Phil," said Leuw, holding up a protesting hand, "you won't get me on to that tack again. We happened to light on the subject eight years ago, if you remember, and you did not discuss it with the philosophic calm I expected of you. Let's talk of something else. What's your idea in taking up your quarters down here? Mother told me she couldn't quite see it. You went in for holding classes—in fact, I caught you at it myself just now—buying clothes and things for odd urchins, sending sick people down to the seaside all on the quiet, and playing my Lord Bountiful generally. Pastime, I suppose, eh?"

A drawn look came about Phil's lips at the concluding question.

"Is that how it strikes you?" he said, shooting a swift glance at his brother.

"I did not say it struck me one way or the other," replied Leuw, his tone bearing out, apparently, the neutrality of his thought. By comparison with it Phil's sounded quivering.

"Yes, Leuw, I have made it my pastime—in the same spirit that you set up your mineral water factory to prevent yourself from getting bored. Doesn't it seem to you an amusement one could take very seriously?"

"I don't see how it could be taken otherwise," said Leuw.

"But the fact remains," went on Phil almost sul-

lenly, "that, considered as work or play, you can't quite understand how the thing should ever take anybody's fancy—eh?"

"How do you make that out?" asked Leuw sharply.

"Only by the manner in which you talked of it. I have half an idea that instead of my 'Lord Bountiful,' it was on the tip of your tongue to say 'Don Quixote.'"

Leuw smiled strangely. "I must not blame you, Phil," he then replied gravely. "I admit, I always have been a bit of a mystery-monger, and I could not expect that our eight years' separation should have taught you to understand me better. What you took for indifference on my part was only my way of expressing astonishment."

"Astonishment at what, Leuw?"

"At you—at your coming to meet me half-way, when I had made up my mind for a troublesome journey before I would get to you."

"I am trying to catch your drift, but —" And Phil shook his head helplessly.

"One moment, please, Phil. What else was I to expect? I knew you were having a brilliant career. You were making a name for yourself. Everybody was looking on you as a 'most promising' young man. And, between ourselves, our people are, perhaps, a little inclined to hero-worship. I fancied you to myself—in my gloomier moods, I confess—the darling of the Maida Vale drawing-rooms, flattered and molly-coddled, making the most of your social opportunities, and growing a head the size of a pumpkin. And what is the truth? I find you here, in the

thick of the mud and the misery, pushing away from you all that puts the glitter on life to a man of your age, and taking on yourself the duty which most people—God forbid I should say all—are only too pleased to pass on to their neighbor.”

“And is that what you meant by my coming to meet you half-way?” asked Phil breathlessly.

“Yes, Phil, because I was not going to start without you—I was decided on that. And now it’s I who have to beg to be allowed to accompany you.”

“When did you first think of it?” came softly from Phil.

“I don’t remember the time when I did not think of it. I had made it my aim long before I could reasonably hope ever to carry it into effect.”

“And now that the possibility has come to you, all the more wonder that the desire should have remained. Look at all you have done and won; look at the thousand and one inducements to distract you from your purpose. . . .”

“Now you are turning the tables on me, Phil. For heaven’s sake, don’t let us begin by developing into a mutual admiration society. But your last point deserves answering. I never allowed myself to sink to the status of a money-grubbing machine—I wasn’t so foolish as that. I took good care to keep human; because one day I wished to enjoy what I had toiled for, and machines can’t do that. And it’s wonderful, Phil, what an edge it puts on a man’s feelings to be much alone. Many and many a time, as I sat all by myself, looking out on to the veldt, and listened to the night throbbing around me—don’t laugh, I know it sounds frightfully poetical—I thought to myself:

'Leuw, that is the heart of your people beating.' I never knew how near they were to me till I had put the distance of a few thousand miles between us."

There was a silence, which neither seemed inclined to break. At length Phil spoke.

"I felt the same, Leuw. Certainly, geographically speaking, I never was as far away from them as you—a great part of the time not more than an easy after-dinner stroll. But then there was the danger, nevertheless, of my drifting so far away from them that not even you would have been strong enough to draw me back again. I never saw that danger myself, I must admit, till you pointed it out to me just now."

"Not very tactfully, I am afraid. But you must make allowances. Out there where I was scales are used more for weighing gold than for weighing words."

Phil looked at him affectionately. "If this is no time for compliments, it is much less a time for reproaches," he continued. "I don't think that anything we have said could pass for one or the other. I certainly do not take any credit to myself for what I have done, because I hardly could have done otherwise, had the temptations been twice as great. I cannot even claim it was a conscious action on my part; it was simply an instinct that would take no denial. These people, speaking to me in the voice any man will give ear to before all others, the voice of his youth, these people called, and I followed."

"Anybody would think we were justifying ourselves," broke in Leuw.

"No, not justifying ourselves, but defining our position. There are hundreds, thousands of us who, as

the cant phrase has it, have risen superior to their surroundings. They have emerged from the teeming, struggling depths of their kindred in race, flattering themselves they did so by their own native mother-wit, and sublimely ignorant that the capital they started with was their portion of the national inheritance, which our people had accumulated during the years wherein their oppressors thought they were beggaring them irretrievably in hope and health and the will to live. And thus few, very few, have returned to give tithe or toll of their success where it was due."

"Go on, Phil; the clearer we see the situation the better."

"Leuw, there is nothing that makes me more hopeful of the issue than that we two, so different in bent and disposition, should have met on this as common ground. You and I represent—let us say it without a false sense of modesty—the two main characteristics, the two broad subdivisions, in which the vitality, the stamina of our people admittedly manifests itself; you the material, the commercial, to speak accurately—I the intellectual. It is the systematic and heart-whole co-operation of these two which is the first great requisite, if we are to react with any effect at all on the subject of our experiment. Excuse the coldly scientific phraseology. The man of business will be asked to contribute the sinews of war and—a matter of equal importance—his knowledge of practical affairs. On the student will devolve the task of employing his delicate touch—may I say his moral finesse and subtlety?—in probing the somewhat difficult and self-contradictory organism into which the force of circumstances has turned the modern Jew.

That the latter requires tender handling I suppose you are prepared to admit. The phases of his character are as numerous as the vicissitudes he has survived; and unless you take him at the proper psychological moment, it is possible that he will look on our approaches as the would-be cunning of a rather stupid enemy. This, then, is my province. I think we men of the study are more adept in applying the thermometer to his soul than you of the market-place."

"I am awfully glad," said Leuw seriously. "I was half afraid you would get on stilts, and go in for visionary vaporings and all that kind of thing. There is something very re-assuring in the prompt, cut-and-dried way in which you manage to put the case."

"I am only saying what I have written elsewhere," smiled Phil.

"Have you? Then why on earth don't you trot it out?"

"Oh, it's hardly worth while, Leuw—I have only just put down a few rough notes, which I didn't have the heart to elaborate. Still, if you want to listen—"

Phil reached out for a substantial copy-book, and found the place.

"The solution of the so-called Jewish question," he read, "must be sought for, separately and individually, in the countries which the respective contingents of our coreligionists have adopted for their habitat. That so few efforts have been made in this direction is a serious reproach to the leaders of Jewish thought and the men whose influence is of a more material nature. Of late they seem to have washed their hands entirely of the responsibility, owing to the propaganda for repatriation to the land of our fore-

fathers and the consequent resumption of a national or rather international activity, which has fired the imagination of the Jewish proletariat. That this dream is as yet within no measurable distance of realization, even the most perfervid of the self-appointed restorationists will have to admit; he will equally admit that any intermediate disciplining of our racial resources cannot but act beneficially on whatever may prove the eventual outcome of the movement. The claims of justification for this latter seem exaggerated—even with regard to the situation in Russia, where it is undoubtedly at its acutest.”

“Even in Russia, Phil?” exclaimed Leuw. “Isn’t that a rather bold thing to say?”

“Honestly, I can’t say otherwise,” replied Phil. “I own I may be drawing too sweeping inference from a somewhat cursory observation. But I cannot go against my impressions. The educational and topographical restrictions are, of course, sad and undeniable facts, the removal of which must be left to the almost irrepressible spread of political and religious tolerance. But the economic condition of the bulk of the Jewish population compares favorably with that of the orthodox peasantry.”

“Yes, and what about the petty tyranny of which we hear so much?” interposed Leuw.

“I don’t know. What I noticed at the frontier stations, not in one instance but in several, was this: the ‘mujik’ hawker, on his way to the neighboring German market-towns, handed his passport in at the gendarmerie, cap in hand, positively squirming with humility; his Jewish *confrère* strolled by unchallenged, with a nod of careless recognition to the sergeant on duty. Doesn’t that seem to you significant?”

"It certainly seems contrary to accepted notions," agreed Leuw, with half a smile. "But let us keep to the point; how do you go on?"

"The main difficulty which has to be contended against is the strong centripetal tendency of the Jewish laboring classes, even in the countries where no limitations of domicile exist. The Ghetto days survive in the Ghetto ways; the walls, which were at once their prison and their barricade, have fallen, but they do not yet know what to do with their liberty; they have still to be taught that this huddling together, like sheep in a storm, is happily—with scarcely any qualification—an anachronism. And that a most lamentable one. This congestion has bred a sort of economic cannibalism, which devours, without digesting, the best energies of the workers; it has perpetuated a monopoly—one might almost call it a monotony—of trades, with well-nigh internecine results."

The words stirred a vague chord of memory in Leuw's brain. Where had he heard them before? He remembered. He had thought these things himself, he had written them down on his heart in letters of fire, the day he first had gone out to grapple with the world; and because he had grown so familiar with them, it came to him with the force of a revelation to hear them uttered by other lips.

"The chief desideratum, then," continued Phil, "is a gradual, but unintermittent process of decentralization. The Jewish workingmen must be drafted into other occupations, other places of abode. The dispersion will be the more difficult, because it would appear to necessitate, to some extent, the infringement of certain of the most time-honored Pentateuchal ordinances . . ."

"Yes, Phil, that is a point we must make sure of," said Leuw seriously. "The Sabbath, the Dietary Laws, are matters which we cannot dispose of by compromise. It would be a shockingly prodigal thing if, after having made our history a long chronicle of martyrdom for their sake chiefly, we should now let them go to the wall. It would almost jeopardize our reputation for thrift," he added smilingly.

"But we shall not let them go to the wall," was Phil's deliberate reply. "What concerns the Dietary Laws, adherence to them requires at the worst nothing more than a self-denial in certain articles of food, which are not a *sine quâ non* of physical well-being. I am not preaching what I would leave for others to practice; all during my stay at Cambridge I was a vegetarian. Of course, the seventh day question is a greater obstacle, but by no means an insurmountable one. There are a number of occupations wherein the Jewish operative could, in exchange for his Saturday off, relieve his Christian colleague of work the latter is compelled to do on the Sunday. An opening for this would present itself in farm-labor, especially at those periods of the year when the soil requires uninterrupted attention. Another vast province would be found—remember I am just speaking off-hand—in iron works, such as rolling mills, where, but for rare intervals, the machinery has to be kept going day and night, week in and week out; and again, in the provision of electric and hydraulic power, which are necessities every day of the year. Then comes employment on railways, omnibuses, and other means of traffic and communication; also superintendence in public buildings—libraries, museums, picture-galleries."

"Yes, the 'exchange' system ought to work well," said Leuw.

"As you pointed out, Leuw," continued Phil, "in the case of these two staple ordinances of our creed we cannot make a compromise; but that need not prevent our making allowances. To adopt an attitude rigorously Calvinistic would only end by begetting a spirit of faction, which, as it were, would drive wedges into the compactest of our communal interests. Surely, it is not too much to expect that our thorough-going, practical philanthropy should find its counterpart in a little doctrinal charity. Let us give the weaklings amongst us the benefit of the doubt; say they succumbed, not to the promptings of their personal convenience, but to the irresistible pressure of circumstances. Let us believe that each one of them would be a conforming Jew if he could. We have even no right to grudge the loss of those who have fallen away entirely; they are the ransom we must pay to the world for our emancipation. But those who seem to be halting midway, we must, without any reservation whatever, recognize for our own. It is true, as you contend, that it would be a sad waste of valuable effort, were we to resign the outward observances of our faith after undergoing so many ordeals for them; but conversely, these same ordeals must be considered equally futile, if they have not ingrained in us a Judaism which breathes and palpitates without drawing its life from even the most vitalizing externals."

"Well?" asked Leuw expectantly.

"I have finished," replied Phil. "All I have done was to clear the ground for you. I mean," he explained with an apologetic laugh, "as you are going to pay the piper, I must dance to your tune."

"I am willing and able to help," rejoined Leuw soberly; "but beyond that I can say very little. You have been on the spot; you must know the necessities of the case much better than I do. You have looked back, you have looked round; you surely must have looked ahead. Tell me what is to be done. Perhaps I shall come in afterwards with a suggestion or two of my own."

"Leuw, I feel honored by your commission," said Phil with suppressed eagerness. "Yes, I have looked ahead—almost till my gaze lost itself in the distance. But for all that I kept my immediate object well in view. Still, as your notice is so short, you must for the present be satisfied with a mere outline."

Leuw signaled him to proceed.

"The element on which we should concentrate our operations," continued Phil briskly, "would be the younger growth of the East End Jewry—there where every step of ours would be on well-explored ground. The older generation we should leave out of the question; working backwards is always a thankless task, and in this case an almost impossible one. The most that can be done for them is to influence their conditions of life by beneficial measures of local application, the duty of which devolves on the institutions already existing for this specific purpose."

Leuw nodded assent. "Yes, I think they must be left to their fate," he said half to himself.

"Very well, then," resumed Phil; "let us go step by step. Our only chance of effecting this much-needed decentralization lies with the young. What happens with the average East End lad of Jewish parentage after he leaves school? His father—a tailor

or a bootmaker in ninety cases out of a hundred—either takes him into his own workshop, or apprentices him elsewhere to one of these trades with their numerous subdivisions. He is not to be blamed; what should he do? He would gladly save his child from the life of drudgery, from the hand-to-mouth existence which has been his own lot. But his outlook on the world is so circumscribed, and there is nobody to advise him. And so the lad grows up, marries, raises a family, and adds his quota to the congestion, or at least keeps it constant. And then he repeats his own history in that of his children.”

“Very true,” commented Leuw. “Well?”

“Leuw, we must stop that boy, and as many more of him as it is possible, from getting swallowed up by the sweating-den. When he leaves his elementary school, there must be waiting for him a more advanced school, some sort of training establishment where he can prepare himself for some one of the occupations enumerated above. Of course, we should have to adopt a careful system of differentiation. The boys are not equally gifted, and their spheres must naturally be in accordance with their bent and capacity. But there can be no doubt that they would benefit, each in his degree. Take a lad whose intelligence does not fit him for anything higher than a 'bus-driver. Will he not be better off with forty shillings a week all the year round than with two pounds weekly for only six months out of the year and a very good chance of consumption thrown in for perquisite? We know, of course, that 'bus-drivers must start as stable-boys. That and all kindred considerations we must leave to a Location Bureau, which may, or

may not, form an annex of our scheme. But we may safely base our calculations on the fact that the large majority of the boys with whom we shall be dealing will be of the mental status required by the higher grades of manual occupations. This is fortunate, because it considerably widens their scope of eventual employment. It is quite true that we Jews as a race have never taken kindly to callings involving the applied sciences. This is one of the things which discount the feasibility of the colonization of Palestine. But as far as the purpose in hand is concerned, that need not alarm us. We are never slow to rid ourselves of any characteristic deficiency, so long as a tolerable remedy is offered us. We should begin the course of remedy under the most favorable auspices—in a country where the genius for mechanical science is one of the most prominent of the national attributes. But we should never get any appreciable results without definitely organized action—organized action as embodied in this proposed foundation of ours. Well, Leuw, do you think it worth the founding?"

A troubled look came into Leuw's eyes. "I understand what you mean," he said slowly—"a training institute, chiefly of a technical nature, and intended exclusively for our young coreligionists. But should we really be supplying a want by making it essentially Jewish?"

"I can see you, too, are frightened at the denominational bogey," said Phil, smiling confidently. "But I think I shall be able to re-assure you. I myself am strongly antagonistic to any uncalled-for separatism; in fact, it was due to my opposition that an attempt at the erection of a Jewish hospital fell through. But

this Institute of ours must be sectarian, or not at all. I know, of course, that there are non-denominational institutions fulfilling this same purpose. Then, why do Jewish parents avail themselves of these so sparingly? Partly because they are ignorant of their true purport, but more largely because they are vaguely afraid of subjecting their children to strange influences. By placing our Institute on a strictly Jewish basis, I am certain we could get them to appreciate more vividly the advantages of launching their children on new careers, and, in the second instance, make them more willing to endure the sacrifices entailed on them by deferring the wage-earning of their children for some years. But, Leuw, I have a much stronger argument; the necessity for giving it a denominational character depends on far loftier motives. Once more—what are our premises? The pressure on the Jewish area. We propose to relieve it by the removal of those fitted for pursuits outside the East End routine. We are going to make them enter on new surroundings, new interests, and a mode of life contrary to all their past experiences. Then comes the question whether the precepts of their faith, the fundamental principles inculcated on their childhood, will be proof against the on-rush of strange and powerful impressions. Once they get swept off their feet, God knows how far they may drift.

"One moment, Phil," broke in Leuw. "You seem to be contradicting yourself somewhat. Didn't you say the Jew's history should have made his religion an instinct with him?"

"It should, and let us hope it has," retorted Phil; "but in this instance we must leave nothing to acci-

dent. Remember what is at stake. We are taking the very pick of the young generation—for precedence of admission would be given to those who excel both in mental and physical respects—and propose to put their allegiance to a very severe test. Should they fail, the loss to us would be considerable. That is why we must endeavor manfully to imbue their minds, at the time when they are beginning to ripen into understanding, and yet retain all the plasticity of youth, with the ineradicable sense of our memorable past and God-ordained future. And to do that, we must hold them under our immediate control. But there would be a yet more positive result. These young men will go forth into the outer, larger world as specimen samples of their brothers-in-faith. It will depend much on the ethical training we have given them whether or not they will do something towards eliminating false prejudices and unjust preconceptions from the hearts of those who know us only from surface observation or hearsay. To contend that the three years they will pass in a sectarian atmosphere will impair their public spirit, their sense of duty to our great country, is nothing but a gratuitous slander. For one thing, the fostering of these will form as important a feature in the curriculum as the more obvious subjects. And it has yet to be proved that a man's loyalty to his religion disqualifies him for a patriot."

Leuw was about to speak, but on second thoughts allowed Phil to proceed unchecked.

"It would be premature to go into the inner details of the scheme. But this much, Leuw, we must make up our minds on: there can be no half-heartedness

about it. It must be thorough. Tuition must be given during the regular day hours, when the lads are in possession of their undiscounted energies. Don't let us bungle the thing by holding perfunctory evening classes, where they would drop in casually, worn out with a long day spent at their apprentice work, to tinker away in the laboratories for an hour or so, just to fill up the gap between then and bedtime. They must be alive to the sense of discipline both for mind and body—we shall have much to do to remedy our culpable neglect of physique. Whether attendance should be entirely free or not, we must leave for later consideration. But we should not be far wrong in laying down as a law that, wherever exceptional ability should be discovered, it will be helped on to what may be called the commissioned ranks of the professions."

Leuw got up from his chair, and silently paced the room for a moment or two. Then he turned resolutely to his brother.

"All right, Phil, you shall have your Institute," he said.

"My Institute? Why not ours?" queried Phil.

"Well, then, ours. I only wished to signify that the credit of the initiative belongs to you. You ask for time to elaborate the details of the Scheme; I must also ask for time to consider the scale on which it is to be launched. But, meantime, you have been guilty of a curious omission. Your list of possible new occupations makes no mention of service in the army and navy."

"Yes, a grave omission," conceded Phil readily.

Leuw acknowledged the avowal by a look, and con-

tinued: "I know from statistics that the number of Jews serving in the land forces, at any rate, is quite in proportion to the number of Jews residing in this country. Still, I want it to be much more than that, and should make preliminary training for both services one of the more prominent traits of our Institute. Do you remember"—Leuw's voice became a little husky—"do you remember old Christopher Donaldson?"

"Most certainly I do," said Phil, almost reproachfully.

"The night before he died, Phil, he told me we Jews ought to have a standing army, of men of our faith, ready to send wherever any of our coreligionists were being ill-used. Of course, his mind was wandering; but, nevertheless, there was a great moral in his words, and my desire to justify their spirit is growing stronger day by day. It is only by taking on ourselves the national burdens of Empire to a greater extent than can reasonably be demanded of us that we should requite our obligations to the mother-land, which says she has no step-children. For that we must give good measure, pressed down and running over. Fortunately, we shall not have to begin at the very beginning; already this duty has come home to most of us. I have heard of the movement for Jewish Boys' Brigades recently set on foot, and grasp its splendid possibilities."

"Then you will be glad to hear that it is meeting with wide recognition," said Phil. "For instance, two months ago, I understand, its funds received a welcome contribution 'in memory of somebody or other'; it was anonymous and I forget the exact amount."

"Only two hundred pounds," said Leuw.

"So it was you . . . ?"

"I told you the story of Sol Myers, the Jewish soldier who was killed at Inkerman while saving Christopher from certain death. I had long been on the look-out for an opportunity of fittingly honoring his memory."

"We shall honor it yet more by making his story serve as text and sermon to the young hearts with whom our task lies," said Phil quietly. "Leuw, unless I am much mistaken, we have done good work to-night. It would be presumptuous to attempt a guarantee even to ourselves, much more to others, whose sympathies with us are as yet precarious. We must make up our minds to disheartenings, misunderstandings, disappointments. But as long as we shall not fail each other, we can look to the main issue with confidence."

"Fail each other?" echoed Leuw. "Surely there is no need to bring that into question."

"God bless you for that. Are you going?" asked Phil, as he saw Leuw take up his hat.

"Yes; I promised mother not to be late. But you're coming along, aren't you?"

"No, thanks, Leuw, not to-night. I shan't be fit for any decent company till I have set up the preparatory draft of our Scheme to see what it looks like, at least on paper. I expect to have it ready for you by to-morrow morning, and shall bring it down."

"I shall be waiting for you, Phil. So long, then."

Phil saw him to the door. After a cordial grip of hands, by which, more plainly than by words, the one assured the other of his implicit trust and understand-

ing, Leuw was about to go off, when a sudden after-thought seemed to turn him back.

"By the way, what has become of that dark little girl—Effie, I think her name was," he said, with a casual air.

"Oh, she has grown up," returned Phil rather curtly.

"And—and Dulcie?" asked Leuw still more casually.

"She is what she promised to be—a woman among thousands, one of those whom any man must consider it a privilege to know; I," went on Phil, his tone ringing and animated, "I am tremendously proud of her. But you must find out for yourself. Of course, you intend to call on the Duveens soon?"

"Yes, certainly; I haven't left all my manners in South Africa," said Leuw with a jocularly which sounded hollow.

And then he went, carrying away with him an idea, which seemed correct, if only because it was so instantaneous. He contrasted Phil's glowing estimate of Dulcie with his grudging reference to Effie; and many a man who has had more time to bestow on the intricacies of psychological analysis than Leuw Lipcott, would have jumped to an equally false conclusion.

CHAPTER XXIII

DESPITE the intention Leuw had expressed of making an early call on the Duveens, a whole week had gone by, and he had not yet put it into effect. Phil did not press him, partly because he was himself too much engrossed in elaborating the details of their Scheme in accordance with the provisional indications of its extent Leuw had given him, and partly because he relied on Leuw's fixing his own time, as soon as the pressure of work incidental to the establishing of his London offices had relaxed. Perhaps, too, Phil conjectured, he required a little grace for acclimatizing himself once more to the conditions of European life, with which his long sojourn abroad might naturally have brought him somewhat out of touch. It was the latter consideration which prompted Phil to suggest a compromise.

"If you are not busy to-night, I could save you the trouble of a formal visit to Aunt's," he said to Leuw, on the morning of the eighth day after the latter's home-coming.

"Oh,—how?" asked Leuw, his tone in no wise protesting against Phil's insinuation that the visit might contain no particular attraction for him.

"Because Aunt and the girls are coming down this way to-night. We are having the first Happy Evening of the season for the children of the Kettles' Street Board School, where Dulcie and I are managers. It might interest you."

"Of course, it would," replied Leuw readily.

"And after that they are coming on with me to the Molesworth Working Men's Institute; I am down to open the debate there to-night."

"Then I shall make your invitation extend to that as well," said Leuw. "You don't expect I should miss such an opportunity of finding out at first hand what you can do?"

"If anybody had told me a month ago that I should have you among my audience to-night—" began Phil. "But never mind; you will have more chances than you will have time or inclination for to admire my 'gift of the gab,'" he added more lightly. "I shall expect you at Rupert Street—half-past six."

Leuw went about his City work that day with a strange restlessness, which reminded him forcibly of his state of mind on another day, now more than eight years ago and yet so tangibly near, when he had paid his first, and so far also his last visit, to the house in St. John's Wood. More than once he was on the point of getting thoroughly angry with himself. It mortified him to think that the man's hold on himself was no stronger than the boy's had been. And what was his justification for all this ferment of mind? The immediate prospect of meeting once more the girl—of course, she was a woman now—who during his hobbledehoy period, he fancied then, had upset his emotional equilibrium. True, no woman had succeeded in doing that since, or had even beguiled him into the fancy that she had succeeded; but what did that count? Surely he had disciplined himself firmly enough into the resolve that no stranger should become necessary to his self-content—so firmly that it

had required the necessity of setting his affairs on a finally stable footing to bring him back again into the reach of probably the only woman who might jeopardize that resolve. And then his temptation for self-anger grew stronger for his not daring to own to himself the truth. The necessity, which, as he had just alleged, had brought him back, was not so much a primary motive as an eagerly-seized excuse. It gave him at last the long-desired plea for putting his fate to the hazard, which his self-consciousness—his self-distrust he should rather call it—had so far denied him. This woman, who at best should only have been a mere memory with him, had been as vivid and important an item in the economy of his life as the principal events on which his fortunes had hinged. He knew her as intimately. She had grown up beneath his very eyes, as it were, in the letters she had written him, according to her promise, at rare though regular intervals. He had noted the frank impulsiveness of her teens change to the serene sedateness betokening a sense of more instant womanhood. Her irrelevant, girlish prattle on everything and nothing had by degrees divested itself of its more personal tone, and had become limited to references of merely general import. He still remembered the shock it had given him the first time he had seen the formal "Dear Mr. Lipcott" take the place of the customary "Dear Leuw" in the apostrophe of her letters, and that without any further allusion to the innovation. Nor had he been bold enough to challenge the change, but had tacitly acknowledged his perception of its appropriateness by substituting, in his turn, "Dear Miss Duveen" in his next reply to her. And yet

he could not say that her words breathed a spirit of chilling distantness. The almost exultant pride wherewith she touched on Phil's achievements was surely not a feeling she would have manifested to one whom she wished to consider as outside her immediate radius; indeed, it even seemed to hint her satisfaction at their possession of a common interest. During the last few days Leuw had come to regard this satisfaction in a new and, as he thought, more proper light. And that being so, why this absurd flurry, this focussed expectancy? He made an involuntary halt outside a post-office, with a shadowy idea of wiring to Phil some excuse for not keeping his appointment for the evening. After all, it was safe to keep on the right side of things. . . . And then he hurried on, smothering an exclamation of disgust. He was acting like a child which has happened to say "boo" to itself, and then runs away from an imaginary danger.

"You are punctual," said Phil, as Leuw entered the rooms at Rupert Street.

"One of my redeeming faults," smiled Leuw. "What are you doing there? Still at the Scheme?"

"I was just glancing through my draft again."

"It's a great shame that I leave all the work on your shoulders," said Leuw.

"I only wish it were twice as heavy, Leuw. What makes me wonder is that you should be content to leave it all to me. You always were so keen set on doing things for yourself in the old days. Has the leopard changed his spots?"

"No, but a wise man knows a wiser when he meets him. I should only hamper you by interfering at present. My time will come too."

"Will it come soon?" asked Phil, with obvious anxiety.

"I am quite as impatient for it as you are," replied Leuw.

"It was wrong of me to ask, seeing that I had your assurance already," said Phil apologetically.

"Nonsense, Phil; you don't think I am suffering from lung complaint that I must husband my breath?"

Phil laughed, and proceeded to put on his overcoat.

"We must be off at once, we are late already," he cut short the discussion. "Luckily we haven't far to go."

A walk of five minutes brought them to the school.

"They are here," said Phil; "I can see the carriage waiting at the other end of the street. This way, Leuw."

Leuw strained his eyes before entering to catch a glimpse of the thing which to his boyish fancy had stood for everything that was great and desirable on this earth. There was something provocative in the act, as though he were eager to obtain a standard of comparison between his past and present impressions. But he was foiled; just at that moment the carriage crawled round the corner. Leuw laughed to himself, as though somebody had played him an unsuccessful practical joke. Where the joke came in, he could not exactly say; but he felt vaguely grateful at having contrived enough equanimity at the prospect of meeting Dulcie as to indulge in even an apology of a laugh. Swiftly he followed Phil into the hall at the bottom of the corridor.

"Just wait here a moment," said Phil as they got into the doorway.

Leuw was nothing loath. Dazed and deafened, he tried to take in the screaming, scrambling hurly-burly of about two hundred youngsters, in knickerbocker or petticoat, making merry in real good *carte-blanche* fashion. The area at the disposal of the frolickers was somewhat limited, but they seemed endowed with a marvelous knack for making every one inch of ground go the length of a yard. Half amused, half solicitous, Leuw watched Phil's laborious progress through the turmoil, each one of his steps threatening havoc and overthrow to the blindly cannoning little ones. So it seemed quite a long time before Phil managed to gain the other extremity of the hall, where a tallish young lady, standing with her back to him, was busily turning one end of a skipping-rope. Leuw more than guessed who she was, and it was with a strained sort of curiosity that he noted the effect of Phil's message upon her. The sharp turn of her head in his direction ought to have gratified him. And presently she was making towards him, steering her course cleanly and surely through the living labyrinth, which seemed specially intended to give a clearer setting to her dexterous yet dignified grace. The next instant she was standing before him, holding out her hand and smiling at him frankly as she said:

"It is very good of you to come here, Mr. Lipcott. I hope you are going to make yourself useful to-night."

"I'm afraid I don't know how to—this isn't much in my line," replied Leuw, smiling back at her tremulously.

"Never mind, you will soon pick it up; and if you are not too proud to be taught, I shall give you a hint

or two. Come over to my 'beat'—we mustn't get in the way of the other helpers. Don't be frightened—the kiddies don't mind a little tumble; it's all in the fun," she laughed, as she saw him take a hesitating step forward. "Mother is upstairs in the workroom, and Effie—you remember her, don't you?—is at the piano. She started dutifully with the barrel-organ tunes, and then, as usual, lost her way into Beethoven. Fancy playing the 'Kreutzer Sonata' to little mites of ten. Fortunately nobody can hear her."

Leuw kept close in her wake to take advantage of the thoroughfare she, as it were, carved out for him. He knew very little about the "Kreutzer Sonata," and so could not judge of its absurdity as a musical entertainment for children. What he could judge of, and that very accurately, was the pleasure the manner of her welcome had given him. It was so honestly spontaneous and unpremeditated; it held no suggestion of loose, very loose, ends of acquaintanceship having to be picked up and knotted together again. Indeed, anybody not cognizant of the true state of things might have imagined that, after parting overnight, they had met here by appointment. But it was not so much her lack of surprise at seeing him that pleased him; no doubt Phil had informed her of his return; it was the absence of any sign of curious scrutiny, which under the circumstances might have been forgiven in the best of good breeding. He also had scarcely given her a critical glance; he felt it was quite unnecessary. Perhaps he, too, had become as familiar to her, inwardly and outwardly, through his letters as she to him. And then his brows contracted darkly. Since when had he taken to flattering him-

self so egregiously? He knew what he knew, or guessed, and yet . . .

"How can you get yourself into a brown study amid this din?" laughed Dulcie at his elbow.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," he stammered in confusion, "I—I—what is it you want, my dear?"

He bent down to the round-faced little girl, blanketed in a huge, white pinafore, who was lipping up at him:

"Pleathe, mithtter man, thir, you take one end the rope, and pleathe, lady, you the other. I like thkip-ping with two tall peopleth turnin'."

And thrusting the rope-end without more ado into Leuw's hand, she stood ready for action.

"I am afraid there is nothing to be done but to humor this very positive young person," said Dulcie as soon as her amusement permitted her to speak.

"I think so, too," agreed Leuw with a rather rueful smile.

He began with a stiff awkwardness which did not suit the positive young person at all, and her shrill directions for increase of speed compelled him to apply himself to the business more seriously.

"Why, Mr. Lipcott, you are bcoming quite an expert," Dulcie rallied him.

"One might as soon do a thing well if one does it at all," replied Leuw with labored cheerfulness.

"Ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine—hundred," yelled the positive young person, as she collapsed, panting triumphantly: "Never got up to a hundred before."

"Did you hear that, Mr. Lipcott?" said Dulcie, this time only half playfully. "You have got your reward

already. By doing your best you have enabled other people to do better. No, dearie, you mustn't run away without thanking the gentleman."

"Please, mithter man, thank you, and don't look tho worried," obeyed the positive young person as she turned to defend herself vigorously against certain detractors of her prowess, who had insinuated that she really had not "done the hundred," inasmuch as she had counted "fifty-nine—seventy."

Leuw had to pay the penalty of his success as a "turner," by being kept at his post until the time for the magic lantern show had arrived. Here again, under Dulcie's captaincy, he did yeoman's work in helping to get the children seated expeditiously. Phil had not been much in evidence; immediately after handing Leuw over to Dulcie, he had taken up his stand at the piano, where he listened to Effie with a rapt look that seemed intended to compensate her for the inattention of the others. It was kind and considerate of him, thought Leuw, though Effie, from the recollection he had of her, hardly appeared the sort of girl to take the heedlessness of her audience much to heart. Once or twice he had noticed Dulcie cast a fugitive glance at the pair, and each time something like a perplexed smile had stolen about the corners of her mouth. Shortly before the magic lantern began operations, Phil brought Effie up.

"If the mountain refuses to come to Mahomet—welcome back to England, Mr. Lipcott," she said pleasantly.

"You were at the piano, and I remembered you did not like to be interrupted," smiled Leuw in extenuation.

"Did you? What a pity you should have wasted your memory on such a trifle."

"Still I did not do so at the expense of anything else I should have remembered," replied Leuw, falling into her vein.

"Anything else? What, for instance?"

"Don't you answer her," broke in Dulcie; "if you humor Effie the least little bit, she will have you in the thick of a wrangle without your having the faintest notion how you committed yourself to it—ah! here comes mother."

Leuw found no difficulty in making his heart respond to the evident sincerity of Mrs. Duveen's greeting. His hand pressed hers again and again in gratitude for her words: "I am so glad—for your mother's sake." They reminded him how much this woman had done to help his mother to bear the burden of her loneliness.

The lantern slides were a great success, at least so Leuw opined from the shouts of delight wherewith the children punctuated their progress. Of the actual display he saw very little, because his attention was absorbed by a living picture in his more immediate neighborhood, to wit, Dulcie seated on a chair with a peaky-faced little hunchback on her lap. The pathetic trust with which the little fellow nestled against her seemed to set upon her a seal of loving reliability; his helplessness brought out in relief the splendid strength of her young womanhood. One had but to look at her to know that here was one whose soul was clamoring for high responsibilities—the higher, the more acceptable. Leuw's heart heaved almost into his mouth: it was many a day since he had seen so generous, so inspiring a sight.

The "Happy Evening" was over. It had ended up with the presentation of an orange and a penny cake to each of the children as they filed out. Leuw helped in the distribution by handing the oranges from the basket to Dulcie—a task in which he did not cover himself with glory. More than one of the oranges slipped through his grasp, and he had the humiliation of hearing the positive young person call him "butter-fingers" under her breath; but then the positive young person could not yet possibly know how easily sometimes the casual touch of a woman's hand will disorganize a whole man, though on all other occasions his gripping capacity may be that of an octopus.

The carriage had been asked to wait, because Mrs. Duveen was returning home by herself. She did not go on to the debate, as the somewhat delicate state of her chest precluded the idea of a two hours' stay in an atmosphere which was a blend of all the known varieties of shag-fumes emanating from clay pipes long deserving of superannuation.

The narrowness of the pavement, by giving it an air of necessity, took all appearance of design out of the way the young people paired off—Phil and Effie in front, Leuw and Dulcie behind.

"What do you think of our 'Happy Evenings,' Mr. Lipcott?" asked Dulcie, after Mrs. Duveen had waved her final good-by from the carriage.

"I believe they are very well in their way," replied Leuw.

"That is not a particularly liberal tribute," smiled Dulcie. "To my mind they are perhaps the most satisfactory of all our attempts at doing good. There

can be no mistake about the results; you are your own eye-witness of them."

"Yes, but results which are immediate, are, as a rule, small; at least that is a law in commerce, you may happen to know, Miss Duveen."

"Still, such things depend chiefly on the size of one's aspirations," said Dulcie pleasantly.

Leuw stopped short for an instant: was she referring to the magnitude of his own Scheme? Then remembering that according to compact the Scheme was, for the present, to be a secret between himself and Phil, he continued:

"No, what I mean is only that there hardly seems much call for the effort. You might have achieved as much by leaving the children to spend the hour or two in their improvised playgrounds—the streets. That might at least foster their spirit of independence. Their amusement here gave me an impression of—of the artificial."

"I am glad you had the grace to hesitate over the word," laughed Dulcie. "Surely what you meant to say was 'systematic.' More method in their play might be productive of more method in their work."

"Probably; then what becomes of the immediateness of your results?"

"I admit, Mr. Lipcott, you compel me to shift my ground. But I do not feel the least bit disconcerted. The loss is yours. You men who have been out and about in the world, and know on what a grand scale it is built, have lost the taste for the miniature. I am extremely sorry for you and your like. You must go about continually hitting your heads against the ceiling."

"Thank you for sympathizing with our bumps," bantered Leuw. "Of course—if that will relieve your anxiety—we get used to them after a time."

"So much the worse for you," returned Dulcie quite vehemently. "That means you have become hopelessly callous. When a man ceases to deal with the pettinesses, the negligible nothings of life, he has ceased to deal with life itself."

"Don't tell me that, Miss Duveen, or you will end by making me quite sorry for myself. And just at present I don't want to feel sorry—I want to feel glad."

"Glad? What of?"

"Of the opportunity to thank you for having occasionally remembered a poor exile."

"Oh, that was nothing," was the off-hand reply.

"You should not have said that," observed Leuw quickly.

"Why not?"

"Because you are cutting the ground from under your own attitude by showing the two or more views which may be taken of everything. What you consider a mere nothing I consider a great deal."

"But I refuse to let you take this poor, unfortunate 'nothing' in the sense you do," laughed Dulcie. "Please construe it into an insufficient cause for your gratitude. I liked writing to you, because it gave me an opportunity of putting things down black on white, and enabled me to get a clearer conception of them, which otherwise I should have gone without. So you see the burden of obligation rests heavily on me."

"I am glad to have been of service to you," replied Leuw, with a dim sort of anger at her words. And

yet, to do her justice, what other way could he expect her to put it?

"Of course, you are going to tell me something of your impressions and experiences," she went on briskly.

Leuw promised readily, though with a keen sense of the hypocrisy of his promise. What had he to tell her in addition to the rather lengthy observations on country and people which had been the text of his letters to her? It struck him that she must be aware of this herself, and that her request was only a subterfuge for—for what? Meeting with—talking to him again? This time he did not even rebuke himself for his sanguineness; it was too childish to be treated seriously.

Another minute or two brought them to the "Molesworth." Outside the club building lounged a group of laborers, most of them with their tool-bag slung across their shoulder. They drew back respectfully to allow Phil and his party to pass in; that, and a chorus of "good evenin', sir," showed that Phil was not unknown to them. He responded cheerily.

"We was waitin' to see if you'd turn up all right, sir, if not, we'd be straight off home," replied one of the men in answer to his question why they did not prefer the warmth inside.

The same manifestations of acquaintance and esteem greeted Phil as he stepped into the hall. It was a few minutes to eight, and he had just time for a handshake with the chairman for the evening—one of the more prominent members of the School Board for the metropolis.

"We can always count on a good 'house' when you are down to speak, Mr. Duveen," said the latter pleasantly.

And indeed, by the time Phil rose to his feet, the hall was quite full, and overflowed into the corridor. Nevertheless, when he had concluded his opening sentences, he had got his audience into the state of expectant restraint which puts a poor speaker into a flurry and a good one on his mettle. And Phil belonged to the latter category. The subject of debate was one of the important questions of social reform, which are always more or less agitating the proletarian mind. It needed but little examination of Phil's method of speaking to discover how he managed to obtain his hold over his somewhat difficult audience. He gauged their intelligence to a hairbreadth, it seemed; he kept closely within their educational compass, and yet skilfully avoided all appearance of mental condescension. His phrases were homely, colloquial, without having an air of being specially brought in to suit the occasion. And then there could be no doubt as to the lucidity of his thought, the logic of his deductions, the unerring aim with which he drove home his arguments. But above all, he appeared to possess the happy knack of appealing as man to man, of addressing himself to each one of his listeners individually and separately, and flattering him by making him feel the only one present on whom the full force and drift of the speaker was concentrated.

Such was the impression left on Leuw, who followed his brother spell-bound and breathless. He had come there fully prepared to guard against any natural and instinctive bias in favor of Phil; he would take

him on his own merits wholly and solely. But he now found that his precaution had been unnecessary. The man who spoke and carried him away headlong was not his brother Phil at all; it was some stranger, whose acquaintance he was making here for the first time. He thought of Phil as he had known him during the various phases of his career—as the timid little lad, ever ready to catch hold of his mother's apron strings, as the high-spirited, self-confident public school boy, as the young man, sobered and dignified by the coming prestige of his university course, and finally as the strong, fervid thinker, the calmly reasoning enthusiast, whom he had found on his recent return. And now he saw him under the most unfamiliar aspect of all—as the master mind swaying the moment, as the potential leader of men, giving token of his possibilities by the ease and effortlessness wherewith he converted the listening multitude into an instrument that quivered responsively to his touch.

At least one other person seemed to see him in that rôle. Dulcie and Effie had been accommodated with seats on the platform, while Leuw had expressed himself content with a place in the front row of the body of the hall. It was only afterwards that he realized what had prompted him thereto—the unconscious desire to give himself at last the luxury of a full and undisturbed view of Dulcie's face. So far he had only guessed at it; and it was certainly due to him that he should find out how near he had come to the truth. Not at all near, he had to admit as, toward the end of Phil's speech, he finally mustered up sufficient courage to glance at her. It was then that he became aware of the deep effect Phil must be producing; was

it not made clear to him by her half-parted lips, giving a peep of white-gleaming teeth, by the flush in her cheeks, by the proud look of hero-worship in her eyes? Leuw was glad to see her thus; now he had his impression of her in full. This picture of her was a fitting pendant to the one in which the little crippled boy figured; here she was the woman of great aims, noble aspirations, glorying to hear them nobly voiced. Phil was doing very well; he was building up his case impreguably; he was leaving no weak spot through which his opponent might break and wreak havoc in the phalanx of his facts. But, whether he knew it or not, his greatest achievement that evening were those half-parted lips, those roseate-flushed cheeks. And Leuw wondered how many acres of his freehold property he would give in charity, if that would mean his putting but a shadow of that look into her eyes. His gaze rested for a moment on Effie; the cold placidness of her mien almost stung him to anger. How dared she remain cold and indifferent, when the other one took no pains to prevent her very soul from shining out undisguised?

Phil was succeeded by the opposer of the motion, who was heard with a sort of polite tolerance. After that there were a few floundering attempts on the part of the audience to get up a discussion, and then Phil replied. He took the opposer's arguments, and to everybody's huge delight rent them limb from limb. He had reserved his peroration for the reply speech, and when he finished, he came in for a demonstration, the sincerity of which was manifest.

"God bless yer, sir," croaked a wizened old navvy as the tumult was subsiding. "You're the only one o' the swells what understands us."

And the crowd yelled corroboration.

The hall was emptying slowly. The people who had occupied the platform remained behind to avoid the crush. Phil was the centre of a small congratulatory throng. Leuw thought he chafed a little at being hemmed in, and stepped on to the platform with half an idea of coming to his relief. At that moment Phil emerged, to be met by Dulcie's intense: "Oh, Phil." Phil acknowledged it hastily though heartily, cast an affectionate nod at Leuw, and passed on to where Effie was standing a little way from the others. The member of the School Board was exchanging remarks with Dulcie, and so Leuw was left to his own resources, within ear-shot of his brother and Effie.

"Well?" asked Phil, with a curious eagerness in his voice.

Effie did not answer immediately. "I suppose you were successful; at least they all seemed to think so," she said finally.

"And you?" Phil's eagerness had changed to anxiety.

"Candidly, I did not. All the time you were speaking, it was like seeing you walk about in corduroys. I only want to hear you at your best, say at the 'Eighty Club,' or generally where you can rise to all your height, where you need not stoop to make yourself understood."

"And yet I want so much to please you at all times and in all places," replied Phil. His anxiety had now unmistakably veered round to pain.

"Thank you, Phil. But still when you ask me for my opinion, I must tell you what I think; or would you prefer me to pretend to you?"

"No, Effie, anything but that."

The extinguishing of the centre chandelier came as a strong reminder that the hall attendant wished to get home, and advised the laggards to follow his example.

"Will you see the girls home with me?" asked Phil, turning to Leuw.

"I shall be delighted," answered the latter, his words outstripping his thoughts.

When his thoughts came level with his words, he saw no reason why he should rue them. Whatever mischief the evening had done, he certainly would not minimize by taking himself off to his own company, with its unalluring prospects of ineffectual brooding. In any case the more he saw of Dulcie, the more it would help to confirm his policy—a policy of cool head and steady heart. "That will depend on circumstances," he had replied to Phil's enquiry as to the length of his stay in England. Those circumstances, of course, spelled Dulcie. His business training had taught him the value of surmises, but only in as far as they were used to pave the way to certainties. To stop at them was so unpractical a proceeding as to reflect discredit on an averagely intelligent office-boy. Well, he would stay for his certainty; and if it turned out as it might turn out . . . It was with a feeling of "any port in the storm" that he remembered that the steamers left Southampton once a week.

And meanwhile, harking back to the conversation between Phil and Effie, he wondered why a man should set such tremendous store on the praises of a woman of whom he never spoke except in monosyllables.

CHAPTER XXIV

"FIRST as usual," said Mr. Alexander, in his customary good-natured growl, as he entered the drawing-room at Mrs. Duveen's one evening, a week later; "if this goes on much longer, I shall begin to feel quite undistinguished."

"Then you should improve your manners, and not show yourself so ravenous for your dinner," jested Mrs. Duveen, who was there to receive him.

"Call me an ogre at once, and be done with it," suggested Uncle Bram flippantly. "Who, by the way, is coming to-night? Oh, I remember, that young man from Africa."

"I won't have you call him 'that young man from Africa,'" said Mrs. Duveen energetically; "it sounds like a parody on 'The Wild Man of Borneo.' And he is not wild by any means, I can assure you."

"I never said he was," protested Uncle Bram with equal vigor. "Indeed, my impression of him is that of a particularly sane and rational individual. I dare say he has got on, eh?"

"Yes, I understand he has done very well."

"H'm. I shall be glad to renew our acquaintance. Who else is coming?"

"Only Effie and her mother, Mrs. Lipcott, and, of course, Phil."

"Where's Dulcie?"

"In her room, dressing."

"Has she been at it long?"

"What an odd question to ask, Bram."

"Still, has she?"

"Oh, about half an hour."

"H'm, that's an improvement on the usual."

"What *do* you mean, Bram?"

"Only that my dear little niece is one of those rather aggravating young ladies whose chief pride in life is to get done before everyone else."

"Very proper, too; I should hate to think of her dawdling before the looking-glass."

"That's not the other alternative," replied Uncle Bram warmly. "But when one has a face and figure that are worth bestowing a little pains upon—the long and short of it is, Rose, she does not make the most of herself."

"And pray, what is the point of your valuable remarks?"

"What, Rose, you don't see? And you a woman and a mother?"

Mrs. Duveen almost fell back with a quick little gasp.

"There is your answer whether you are a woman," said Uncle Bram quite fiercely; "for years you go about in blissful indifference, and here I just breathe a word of warning, and you get into a downright panic. Why, what's lost? She is only twenty-three and, well, she is Dulcie."

"You mistake me, Bram," said Mrs. Duveen quickly; "the cause of my alarm is not what you think."

"Then please enlighten me."

"How should I feel if some one were to come between her and me?"

"If you will permit me to be a trifle brutal for once," said Mr. Alexander stiffly, "I shall beg to inform you that I should not consult your feelings in the matter at all. You may say that as a male spinster I have no right to dogmatize on it; I don't—at least not on the sentimental aspect. But I do on the practical, and that most strongly. At any rate, where my dogma leaves off, your duty should begin."

"Yes, yes, Bram," came from Mrs. Duveen almost imploringly, "you are perfectly right; but what am I to do?"

"H'm," said Uncle Bram, scratching his ear, "the worst about it is that there is no direct course of action possible. A machine-made arrangement is, in the case of a girl like Dulcie, out of the question. For the matter of that, it ought to be in the case of every other girl. Again, to point out to her the necessity of taking things into her own hands would make her barricade herself in her room forever. But there will be a change."

"How, Bram?"

"I am going to take her under my wing; you may smile, but I am desperate. She'll have to go in for going out—ahem! I'll make her follow me about to places, if I have to carry her there; and instead of politely yawning the evening through, she will have to take an intelligent interest in the fellows—decent fellows, too, some of them—who give their moustaches an extra twirl when she appears on the scene."

"At one time it seemed young Leon . . ." began Mrs. Duveen.

"Fiddlesticks—an optical illusion, like one or two others of them," interrupted Uncle Bram unceremo-

niously. "I can see what it is. She is modeling herself on that Effie of hers; there's another bright specimen for you. What has come over that girl I can't tell for the life of me. All day long it's Effie and piano, or for a change, piano and Effie—that's what it has been for the last year or two. And when it isn't dumps with her, it's devilry; she doesn't seem to know any happy medium. But the main point is Dulcie. It would simply be an outrage to society to let her remain single, seeing that she is cut out for a wife according to the latest improvements. I tell you, there's going to be a decided change."

"A change in what?" enquired Dulcie, as she stepped into the room at that moment, all soft and dainty in her clinging cream silk.

"In the weather, my dear," stammered Uncle Bram, taken aback; "the barometer has fallen heavily."

"So will you have a heavy fall, if you get into the habit of fibbing. Why, mother dear, you look quite upset; what has he been up to?"

"Nothing, child," said Mrs. Duveen, smiling at her solicitous vehemence. "He was mentioning something about—but never mind, dear, it wouldn't interest you."

"Now that you have convinced yourself that I have been making no attempt on the life of your precious mamma," drawled Uncle Bram with grim politeness, "may I ask whether you will honor me by accepting one of the two tickets I have purchased for the grand ball in aid of the Infant Schools? Under most distinguished patronage, you know; severely select."

"When is it?"

"Next Tuesday week," replied Uncle Bram, weirdly persuasive.

"Tuesday? Couldn't possibly."

Uncle Bram put on his apoplectic look. "Why not?"

"Girl's Club; needlework night," explained Dulcie, cheerfully laconic.

"Consider me to have delivered myself of a naughty word," said Uncle Bram. "Of course, you will put off the needlework."

"Uncle Bram," said Dulcie mock-impressively, "when shall I get you to learn that virtue is its own reward, or should be? You spend a couple of guineas in the cause of charity, and you at once think that gives you an excuse for an orgy of sinful dissipation. For shame! Consider your hair that was."

And she gave his bald pate an affectionate pat.

Uncle Bram submitted speechlessly to the indignity of word and action; then in an "I'll give you a last chance" sort of voice, he tried again:

"Then you won't come?"

Dulcie shook her head with smiling but decisive provokingness.

"There you are," said Uncle Bram as he turned accusingly to Mrs. Duveen, "always some excuse. Girls' Club, indeed, you little mischief"—Dulcie's face had suddenly appeared quite close to his own—"I'll take that Girls' Club and do something to it; I'll disband it—get all the girls married somehow—pay somebody to let a mouse loose amongst them. . . ."

"You dear old bully," cooed Dulcie with both her arms round him, "you are talking absolute rubbish, and you know it. Ah, here are Effie and her mother at last," she exclaimed, bounding away from him, as the house bell sounded.

"Or Phil," said Mrs. Duveen eagerly, as she followed her out into the hall.

Dulcie's guess was right. "I am going up to your room—I want to fix something," said Effie hurriedly to Dulcie; "come along."

Dulcie turned up the gas as soon as they got there.

"Don't do that," came querulously from Effie, who had flung herself on the couch, and was tilting the heel of one foot on the toes of the other.

"But you can't do it in the dark," remonstrated Dulcie, obeying.

"I don't want to do anything; I've got something to tell you."

"Oh, Effie, what can it be?"

Even in the half-light Effie's face showed almost hectic, and her fathomless eyes shone with more than their wonted lustre.

"Dulcie, I went to-day," she broke out defiantly.

"Went where?"

"To the agent."

"What, all by yourself?" breathed Dulcie.

"All by myself, and in broad daylight," replied Effie, more defiantly still.

"And you didn't tell your mother?"

"That's just like you," cried Effie angrily; "you keep on bothering me with stupid questions, instead of asking, as any sensible kind of person would, what the man said to me. And now I won't give you the chance of asking. He said—he is the biggest agent in the line, you know—he said that I had marvelous—yes, don't gape—marvelous talent, and he would not have the slightest difficulty in getting me a hearing on the best concert platforms in town as soon as the season starts. So there."

And she brushed the creases out of her frock with a hand that trembled visibly.

"Oh, Effie, dear," and Dulcie tried to stroke the trembling hand back into self-possession, "you know how I have always felt for your plans and ambitions, and how proud I shall be of you and all that, but. . ."

"Yes, but?"

"But why did you not tell your mother first?"

"Because I did not even tell her afterwards. You are the only one who knows. Oh, Dulcie, I could not stand it any longer, the dull, dreary prospect of doing nothing, being nothing, when I felt all the time I could make my future full with facts, instead of making it empty by dreams. And only because poor papa was so foolish and improvident as to pile up a lot of money in his lifetime, which I now have to drag about with me, if I don't want it to drag me down. Haven't we poor rich people also the right to live?"

"And your mother won't give in?"

"Absolutely certain, and that's why she won't know till I send her a stall for my debut."

"Oh! Eff, you make me feel so wretched," moaned Dulcie.

"I don't care; if I am made to feel wretched, I don't see why somebody else should not feel wret. . ."

With a little cry of horror Dulcie clapped her hand over the mutinous mouth.

"You didn't mean to say that, Effie," she gasped.

Effie seized the repressing hand, and almost bit it in her passionate repentance.

"Oh, no, no, no, Dulce, darling—of course I didn't mean it, but be good to me, only this once more. Help me to carry the secret if you don't want me to die just yet."

Dulcie reflected for an instant, then a joyous look came into her eyes.

"Effie, suppose we divide the secret into three? That will make it ever so much easier."

"Divide it into three? Who is to be the third?"

"Phil, of course."

Effie's lips pursed disdainfully. "I don't see the slightest necessity for Phil in the matter," she said harshly.

"Not for Phil?" exclaimed Dulcie.

"Will you kindly explain your surprise?" asked Effie icily.

"I thought you were such good friends," stammered Dulcie.

"Well, and what if we are? I suppose I can always reserve myself the right of fixing a limit to our friendship."

"I am afraid you have been quarreling," said Dulcie disconsolately.

"Oh, dear, no; you don't think such an extremely correct young man as Phil would give anybody a handle for quarreling?"

Dulcie sighed and was silent. This was not the first time that Effie had given vent to bursts of irritation against Phil in his absence; and yet, though Dulcie had carefully watched them together, she had never noticed Effie's attitude to him to be anything save a consistent, possibly a studied affability. To-day she felt more at a loss than ever; the figure on the couch there was not Effie at all; it was some wan, forlorn mystery that made her heart ache.

"For goodness sake come down," cried Effie, jumping up suddenly. "Don't let us sit mooning here like

a pair of owls. Everything will be all right—some day. But Dulcie. . . .”

“I won’t tell, not a word.”

“Oh, I thought we had settled that long ago. What I mean is, if anybody tries to worry me into eating anything to-night, I shall just take my things and go off home. And you have got to see to it.”

On descending they found Phil and Mrs. Lipcott already arrived.

“I have already apologized for Leuw,” said Phil, noting Dulcie’s look round the room. “He couldn’t get away in time for dinner, but he will turn up for certain later on in the evening.”

At Uncle Bram’s suggestion an immediate move was made to the dining-room.

Phil took no part in the table-talk—at least not in its earlier stages; he appeared to be reserving himself for some special occasion. A momentary lull gave it to him.

“If you all promise not to let it interfere with your appetite, I shall tell you the story of a little idea Leuw and I hit on between us,” he began. “We have kept it to ourselves so far, but now it struck us that we might as well get the opinion of the unprejudiced observer; not that we are going to take the slightest notice of him, but we can’t resist the temptation of cheaply gratifying our curiosity.”

Phil’s manner was half jesting; yet it did not escape his listeners that he was masking a more serious mood. And the attention which it bespoke for him certainly did not decrease as his account of the Scheme proceeded. Despite Phil’s injunction Uncle Bram laid down his knife and fork. Dulcie’s interest was unmis-

takable. Mrs. Duveen and Mrs. Lipcott looked at each other with a quiet smile, half surprise, half congratulation. Effie alone gave no indication of her thoughts; her eyes downcast, she toyed steadily with the little pile of bread crumbs before her.

"Oh, it's splendid, isn't it, Uncle Bram?" came impetuously from Dulcie, as Phil concluded.

"If you will kindly permit me to catch my breath a little, I may be able to answer you," said Uncle Bram, more cautiously. "Did anybody ever hear anything more audacious?"

Phil laughed. "I suppose I ought to be grateful for that, Uncle Bram; you might have said fool-hardy."

"He might have said courageous," broke in Mrs. Duveen softly.

Uncle Bram shook his head vigorously. "No; you won't get me to commit myself. The matter is too responsible for that."

"Don't put such a value on yourself," remonstrated Dulcie; "you heard Phil say before, he would not let outside criticism affect him."

"I know Phil better than that," replied Uncle Bram rather bluntly.

Phil was given no time to repudiate or admit the contention, owing to Leuw's arrival. Mrs. Duveen had left orders that he was to be shown in, even though dinner was still in progress.

"I am, a little earlier than I thought I should be," he began.

"If you want to make excuses, make them for not being earlier still," said Mrs. Duveen as she shook hands with him.

"You came in the nick of time, Leuw," said Phil.

when Leuw had finally got seated. "Uncle Bram showed himself inclined to be a bit cantankerous about our little project."

"Indeed?" smiled Leuw.

"Yes, if by that you mean that I venture to reserve my judgment," replied Uncle Bram amiably.

And then the subject was, as it were, tacitly ruled out of order. Leuw's presence had put an air of constraint upon it; everyone seemed to have arrived at a new sense of its importance, with which the present desultory mode of discussion accorded but ill. And when, at the close of the meal, Mr. Alexander invited the two young men to the smoking-room, their ready response had about it a curious ring of momentousness.

This last followed them into their privacy, and showed itself by the "hedging" wherewith the talk was at first kept on neutral topics. It was not till he was half through his cigar that Mr. Alexander availed himself of one of Leuw's remarks to approach the Scheme.

"Do you know the feeling that came over me at seeing you once more, Mr. Lipcott?"

Leuw looked at him astonished.

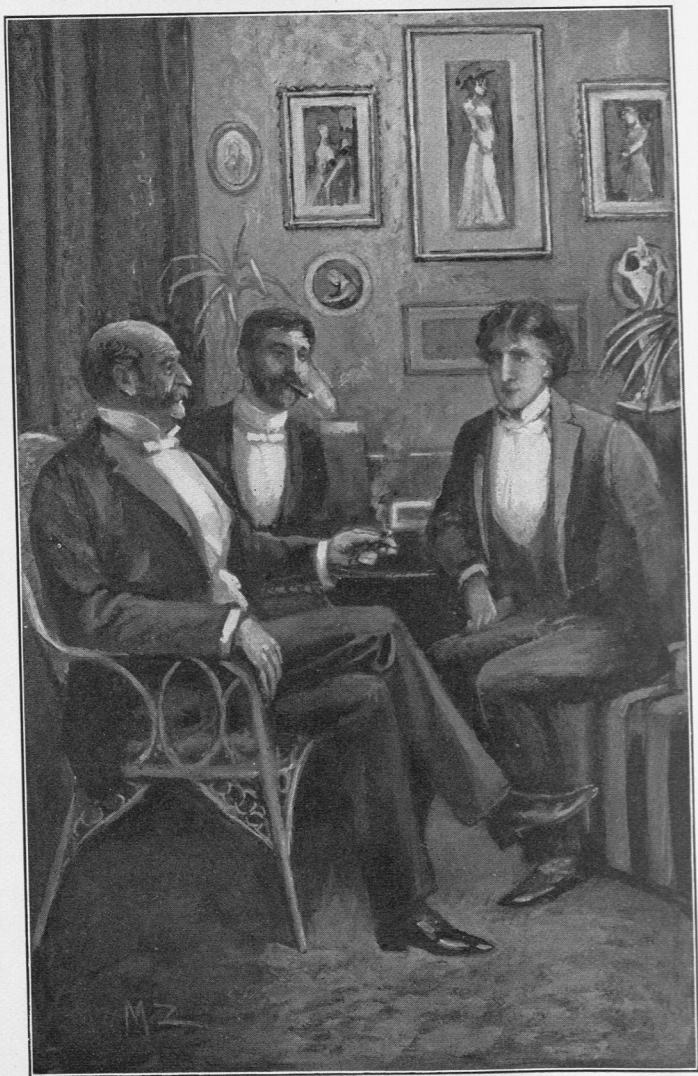
"A sort of shamefacedness," continued the other.

"Surely the cause must have been purely imaginary," replied Leuw.

"You say so because you have forgotten. Do you remember the last time I saw you I suggested putting you under a pledge?"

"But you withdrew the suggestion almost in the same breath."

"Only because you insisted on trusting yourself. You nearly put me to the blush by the brilliant way in which you have justified your self-belief."



"THEN YOU APPROVE OF OUR SCHEME?" EXCLAIMED PHIL
EAGERLY.

"Then you approve of our Scheme?" exclaimed Phil eagerly.

"You show a suspicious deference to my humble opinion, considering the rather stiff-backed attitude I understand you propose to take up," smiled Mr. Alexander.

"By no means," rejoined Phil quickly. "Don't mistake me, Uncle Bram. You know what store I as a rule set on your personal opinion of men and affairs; but in the present instance, it is absolutely valueless. I do not want you to speak as Uncle Bram, but as the communal politician, as the representative of the influences which may be said to dominate the destiny of contemporary English Judaism."

"You only forestall me," said Mr. Alexander. "I was about to draw the same distinction myself. I agree fully that the natural prepossession with which, as an individual, I should view this attempt of yours, puts my personal estimate out of court at once. But I am glad to see that, whatever private resources, both mental and financial, you are prepared to invest in the founding of your Institute, you seem to recognize the fact that its main issue must depend ultimately on what general sympathy and co-operation you succeed in enlisting; and you want me to give you an official estimate, as it were, of your chances of that."

"Precisely," came from Phil, while Leuw contented himself with nodding his assent.

"Both of you must be aware, of course," continued Mr. Alexander thoughtfully, "that the question is one which has exercised our communal parliament—to develop your phrase, Phil—for years. It would be beside the mark for us to discuss the merits or demerits

of the *modus operandi* suggested; its tendencies were scarcely as far-reaching, I might almost say epoch-making, as you evidently claim your own to be. But such as it was, we allowed it to hang fire so long, that we wisely saved ourselves the probable disappointment of a flash in the pan. The pity of it is that we should have expended so much valuable energy in keeping it in its state of suspended animation, instead of bestowing that energy on a more profitable purpose. And now we are exactly as far as we were at the start."

"Not quite so far," interjected Phil; "remember the wasted energy."

"That need not concern you very much; you know we are a hardy and recuperative race," smiled Mr. Alexander.

"Still, while you recuperate, you may forget for what your strength is needed," said Phil, not without some bitterness.

"That we can never do," said Mr. Alexander firmly; "the evil knocks at our doors too loudly, in fact, day by day more loudly, to allow our ignoring it. And herein lies your chief claim to our consideration. That we should approach you with a certain amount of distrust, you must reasonably expect. You offer us a plan contrary to all precedent, a plan which apparently strides along with the seven-league boots of the giant in the fairy tale; and we should not necessarily be dubbed fossilized fogies if we give our spectacles a good rub to get at the true inwardness of it."

"But the Scheme is its own credentials," exclaimed Phil hotly.

"You can trust us with sufficient discretion to discover that for ourselves," replied Mr. Alexander, with

great equanimity; "it would not escape running the gauntlet, even if it came god-fathered by any one of our accredited leaders. Well, then, we should start with the fact I just mentioned—that the necessities of the case show no signs of diminishing; that a policy of trusting to things to right themselves is not justified by the course events are taking, and that by continuing it we run the risk of developing what at present is only a difficulty into a crisis calling for adjustment from without. We clearly, therefore, owe it to ourselves, both as a matter of duty as well as of self-interest, to obviate such a fatality at all costs. Your Scheme, it must be admitted, appears opportunely, at a moment when the mind of the community is not engrossed by considerations of minor import which so often burke the larger issues. That it does not consist of half-way or perfunctory measures, but strikes boldly at the core of the trouble, because it puts the right values on cause and effect, should not disqualify it for experiment—even though the experiment be the most expensive we have yet dared to permit ourselves. For, recollect—I have hinted it already—that your share in the movement can at best be only that of pioneers; it could never be but two men's work, even though they were demigods. The grand total of it cannot be reckoned by units; it must be counted by hundreds, by thousands, perhaps. In that case it becomes an effort worthy of all our combined strength. Nay, more, we should welcome the opportunity for making a grand demonstration—we must be careful not to turn it into an ostentatious parade—of our resources. The strong man feels all the stronger for testing his muscle."

"Well?" asked Phil, his face tense with suppressed

emotion. "Suppose Leuw and I cannot get beyond the ground-work, will you continue the building?"

"I am sincerely glad you put that in the shape of a question," replied Mr. Alexander. "I was afraid that my unqualified positiveness might have led you to assume too much—perhaps everything. But the only inference I can allow you to draw from my words is that we guarantee you our sentiments. Our sympathy may not carry us beyond a theoretical approval."

Phil leapt up from his chair as though stung. "What, and that despite the urgency which exists on your own showing?" he cried.

Mr. Alexander calmly shrugged his shoulders. "Urgency, my dear boy, is, like everything else, a relative term. It may mean a day or a life-time; and 'after us the deluge' has been the watchword of the world ever since Noah's Ark came to anchor on Mount Ararat. If every man who knows his duty were to act on his knowledge, we could safely pension off the Decalogue. You see, we may show ourselves ready to give you every credit for the high principle, the noble disinterestedness of your project; we may laud and applaud it to the skies, and we may do nothing more. Selfishness, culpable apathy, will be your verdict. But you will be wrong; the real cause will be something much less obvious, much less controllable—the mysterious contrariness, the wayward sulking with the occasion, which is our unconscious protest against being called upon to put in splints the things which have got out of joint. I do not say that our better judgment will not prevail; very possibly it may. Only I consider I am rendering you a distinct service in setting before you the potential negatives of the

case. But still, even if you do not obtain the support of the official body, you have another and perhaps more reliable string to your bow."

Phil and Leuw merely looked their enquiry.

"There are our *en gros* philanthropists," continued Mr. Alexander, "the men whose large-heartedness finds an outlet in every channel of communal charity. You would get them to see that the consummation of your Scheme would do much to remove the necessity for some of the Institutions which are the direct outcome of the state of things you would have them help you to remedy. By the creation of a main stream which, to a certain degree, will absorb the tributaries, they will find their purpose better served. And there can be no doubt that among the secondary benefits arising from the Scheme must be the abatement of the dole evil, resulting in a proportionate increase of self-respect and self-reliance among our poor, as well as a more systematic provision against old age and the unforeseen emergencies of daily life. But I apologize—I am straying beyond my province."

"Not unconsciously, though, Uncle Bram," smiled Phil, who by this time had regained his self-possession; "I can see your object; you did not want to end up with a raven's croak. You know yourself that your distinction between the *en gros* philanthropist and the so-called communal leader is quite artificial; the one is the other, and by casting doubt on the one, you involve both. But I shall relieve your anxiety: I have more faith in you than you yourselves have. You won't content yourselves with applauding us, although that might furnish you with an excuse for not putting your hands in your pockets; you won't sulk with

the occasion, because you know you have more to gain by conciliating it. And once you have recognized your duty, you are far too jealous of your credit with your contemporaries and with posterity to pass it by on the other side of the road. But should I be mistaken?"—Phil got up, and his eyes flashed fire—"should I be mistaken, even then I do not consider our cause hopeless. We shall not be disheartened by having to deal in units; we shall compensate ourselves by making surer of the results. We must grow stronger from the very nature of our undertaking. For, as time goes on, we shall become our own recruiting-ground. At least some of the men whom we shall send out, and whom we have helped to a better chance of worldly success, to a truer knowledge of the possibilities of life, some of them, I say, if not all, will remember that they are failures, if they do nothing to help on the good work which has made them what they are. And they will help, as soon as they can, if only to vindicate themselves in their own eyes. They will come back, as Leuw and I have come back, because we are a people whose soul is their traditions, and who have learnt the knack of gripping the future with one hand while keeping hold of the past with the other. I have no taste for acquiring the reputation of a well-meaning hobby rider; the sanction of the community, and all it means, is to me a thing as solemn as it is valuable. But with it or without it, our purpose holds good. Does it, or does it not, Leuw?"

By way of answer, Leuw stepped up to Phil, laid his hand on the other's shoulder, and so the two stood looking at Mr. Alexander.

"Dear me," said the latter, in half-affected, half-genuine distress, "you make me feel quite uncomfortable. What have I done to deserve this distinctly threatening attitude of yours? My only offense was that I made my survey from the standpoint you assigned to me, and so had to leave the situation pretty much as I found it. I could not honestly do otherwise. And yet," he continued reflectively, "I don't know what reason you have to grumble; nothing in what I have said need lead you to expect a downright rebuff, and that by itself is as good as carrying the first position. And then—if you will at last permit me to speak on my own behalf—you can rest assured of at least one friend at court. Mr. Lipcott—Phil—I ask it of you as a favor: let me be your ambassador."

"I think this is the first authentic instance where a favor to the other man means a bargain to oneself," replied Phil buoyantly, as he linked his arm affectionately in Mr. Alexander's. "I must confess to you, Uncle Bram, we have got you ridiculously cheap; I was prepared for a tremendous outlay of canvassing. Now, then, Leuw, we have achieved enough for one day. Come and let us show our laurels to the ladies."

"Only don't make me out such a great acquisition, or I shall waste all my time in growing conceited," laughed Uncle Bram.

"You forget you will occasionally be called upon to report progress," retorted Phil.

"Of my conceit?"

"Of your embassy."

They found the ladies divided in two groups—the older three chatting away busily round the fireplace, Effie at the piano improvising softly, with Dulcie gaz-

ing up at her from the hassock close by. Effie did not appear to notice the entry of the men, except that her touch became fainter still; but Dulcie rose with alacrity, only to see her seat usurped by Phil the very next instant. Uncle Bram had been called over to the fireplace to arbitrate in some insignificant dispute, and Leuw was following him thither, when Dulcie intercepted him half-way. He halted readily.

"I have been waiting for you very patiently, Mr. Lipcott," she said with the naïveté of a child.

"Can I do anything for you?" he enquired eagerly.

"Yes, I want you to grant me your pardon."

"Most certainly, Miss Duveen. And now you may as well tell me for what."

"No, really, I am greatly in earnest. I have been reproaching myself during the last hour for scolding you the other evening, because you did not go into ecstasies over the glories of the children's treat. And with that for my starting-point, I wanted to prove to you that your whole philosophy of life was wrong. With your mind intent on such great things, how could you be expected to give even a passing thought to mere trivialities? How I must have annoyed—or amused you!"

"Let me assure you, you did neither."

"What else can you possibly say? Why, if I remember, I actually had the presumption to pity you. My only consolation is that perhaps you were not listening to me at all."

"But doing what?"

"Thinking of your wonderful Scheme. I don't know how you can let it be absent from your thoughts for a single instant. The length of my acquaintance

with it can only be measured by minutes, and I have already learned to love it."

Her face became troubled, and Leuw fancied he heard a sigh. Her next words convinced him.

"I am very sorry. I suppose to love it will be my only share in it."

Leuw looked at her curiously. "And why not your only share?" he asked.

She answered his look with one of undisguised indignation.

"Quite so, Mr. Lipcott; I ought to have been prepared for that question. If you men allow us women to sympathize with your work, to pray for its success, and—to look on from a distance, you think you have humored us sufficiently. I don't want to be humored, Mr. Lipcott, I want to help, to stand close by, and to feel that at least the tiniest wheel in the machine owes its motion to me. And yet, you are right"—her head drooped despondently—"is there anything I could do that you could not do doubly well? By intruding I should only succeed in preventing the best and fittest from being employed."

Leuw paused for a moment or two, and then bent his head closer to hers, so as to permit himself a sinking of the voice.

"Miss Duveen, you are unnecessarily severe on yourself, as you would have seen, had you waited for me to give the answer to your question. Let me tell you that there are certain things, as vital as any of those which will figure in the formal curriculum, but which neither Phil, nor myself, nor any man living could do half as well as you."

"You are not merely polite, Mr. Lipcott?" she asked with touching anxiety.

"Why should I trifle with you?" he returned gravely. "Listen, Miss Duveen. We shall be dealing with lads whose home life will have had its virtues, but will also have had its defects. Of the latter, those which fall under the heading of more regular discipline you can safely leave to us. But there may be others which we may not be able to reach—rough edges of character, perverted ways of thinking, which require the quick eye of a woman to detect, and the soft, dexterous touch of a woman in the handling. So, instead of an intrusion, your immediate presence will become an essential. It would do more to give them a clear sense of chivalry, of right-mindedness, than the most strenuous example; they would not dare to tell a lie, or harbor it in their hearts, if they knew that you and such as you were coming from time to time to read their faces. But, Miss Duveen, your function would not end there. These boys will be of an age when they feel the first stirrings of their self-consciousness, when they begin to ask themselves questions, and cannot always give an answer. They grow afraid of their future—it seems so near. Added to that may be distressing home circumstances; their work may be misunderstood, their aims belittled. That surely is the time when they most need somebody to rally their hopes, to heap fuel on their courage, to give them back their faith in themselves. And"—he half murmured the words—"I have always imagined that there is none so skilful as a woman in nursing a soul through a crisis."

Leuw paused, not in the least surprised at his own eloquence; he knew whence he derived his inspiration. It was the recollection of the lonely hours he had

struggled through by himself, the aching despondency which had attacked him whenever he had paused to take breath, though its causes were not exactly any one of those he had just enumerated. He only thought of his craving for something soft and sympathetic on which to recoil from the iron-like stubbornness of his own resolve. He had never had a woman friend; it was the one thing for which he had ever envied his brother Phil.

Dulcie, too, remained lost in thought. Then the radiance which Leuw's words had brought into her face, began to ebb, until it finally gave place to utter disconsolateness.

"Thank you, Mr. Lipcott," she said slowly. "You conjured up for me a pleasant dream. It is not your fault that I cannot make it last. How can I ever lift myself to the height of the task you exact from me? True, I have exerted my influence with little children, and perhaps not without success. But what guarantee have I that I shall make it felt on boys—boys that are to become what you wish to make them?"

"You have made it felt on men; so why should you not succeed with boys?"

The words fairly leaped from his mouth, and then, when he found that he had spoken and not thought them, a sudden strength entered into him. He drew himself up, proud and defiant. Let her know, then. It was as though he had disburdened himself of the weight of a humiliating secret.

"On men?" she repeated wondering.

But she had no need to enquire further; could she mistake the look in his eyes? Leuw held his breath: what was coming?

At first a silence; then a faint pallor over her cheeks—so faint, that perhaps it was only the reflected tint of the gleaming silk. But Leuw was not deceived, and his heart came into his mouth. She had understood, and yet she was not angry. For so her next words told him.

"I did not know I had influenced any men, Mr. Lipcott. If I have, I am glad you think it was for their good. Come, let us take pity on Phil and Effie; they seem to be boring each other dreadfully."

Obediently he followed her over to the piano. Her last remark was apparently no exaggeration. Effie had risen, and stood looking through a music album; she was just stifling a yawn. Phil was next to her, watching her with evident perplexity and vexation. Little or no conversation had passed between them.

"Well, what do you think of the Scheme?" he had asked her.

"It seems all right," had been her answer; "I dare say you will make it a success. Only I thought your ambition lay in another direction."

"What other direction?"

"Oh, I don't know; I can't trouble to think."

The groups converged again as the evening wore on. Its close brought Phil another rebuff. "I shall see you home," he said to Effie, as Mrs. Elkin rose to leave.

"No, thanks," was Effie's negligent reply; "mother and I can take care of each other for twenty yards or so."

Leuw also took his thoughts away with him. And so it was that Mrs. Lipcott, on her way home, found her two sons but poor company.

CHAPTER XXV

THE two months which followed were to Leuw not so much a succession of days and weeks as a linkless chain of unabating activity, entailed by the final transference of his affairs to his London establishment, the selection of his staff, and the thousand and one details preliminary to the working order of an extensive concern. It was true that before his return to London he had scarcely intended to set up operations on the large scale which now they seemed likely to assume. He had, perhaps, anticipated nothing more than the appointing of a reliable agent, and so to render his own presence in England necessary only at periodic intervals. But from the first day that he resumed contact with it, the fascination of this, the greatest business centre of the world, had magnetized him hopelessly. The stir and the bustle, the amazing, the magnificent manifestations of its multifarious energies, called out to him as though in challenge, and provoked all of the combativeness of his disposition. He felt that, whatever he had achieved, he had never touched the bed-rock of his powers; he had accumulated, it seemed to him, a surplus residuum of strength, which was continually crying out in protest against its own inutility. Here at last he could give it scope. It was time that he found outlet for it; it might become stale with too protracted disuse, and from being an available help grow into a cumbersome incubus.

In addition to the sense of his full-grown opportunities came the duty he owed to the Scheme—not, however, as a mere make-weight, but as a consideration of equal rank and force; more than equal, Leuw might have admitted to himself, had he dared. The Scheme itself had so far made but insignificant headway. Leuw's own pre-occupation had found its counterpart in Phil's, who could not afford to allow himself any further respite in the preparation for his law "Final." The examination had finished yesterday, and now Leuw was waiting for his brother in the private room he had detached for himself in the imposing offices off Throgmorton Street. It was at the advice of Mr. Alexander himself that they had decided on putting their project into practice without further delay, and without waiting for the weather-signs of public opinion. He thought it probable that the communal leaders would be more impressed with the desirability of the Scheme, if they saw its originators give token of their earnestness by an independent course of action. The spectacle of two individuals essaying the initiative of a task which, by the nature of it, must necessarily rely on support of which they had no guarantee, might turn its quixotic side to the more thoughtless. The more provident, however, would see in it nothing but evidence of a high-spirited disinterestedness; and the quiet confidence it argued could not but appeal intimately to their most generous instincts. And so the mere introductory steps might succeed in, so to speak, forcing the hand of the community. Mr. Alexander's view was perhaps prompted more by the fact that Leuw and Phil had evidently made up their minds to begin without

any side-glance at adventitious circumstances; but his hopeful words could not come amiss, even if looked at in the light of a spur to a willing horse. At any rate, the two brothers had arranged to meet that morning in order to deliberate finally on the all-important question of the site whereon the Institute was to be located.

If Leuw was reluctant to admit how greatly the Scheme had taken hold of him, it was because he knew that it had done so not altogether on its own merits. He would have had to own that, from being a goal in itself, it had, in some degree, become degraded to the level of a means to an end; and his whole being cried shame upon this discount on its dignity. He thought it nothing short of an act of defalcation to make capital out of it for the serving of his own purposes, however much his heart might tempt him thereto. For, indeed, he could not gainsay the fact that the Scheme was developing into an acknowledged bond of sympathy between himself and Dulcie. It raised for them a platform of mutual interest on which, if he had not known better than to give his hopes free play, Leuw might have fancied other things than her keen desire for its consummation would possibly find room. The enthusiasm wherewith Dulcie had welcomed the Scheme at her first knowledge of it had settled down into a reasoning, deep-rooted admiration the more its possibilities had taken shape in her imagination. Leuw, for his part, had availed himself freely of his right of access to the Duveen family circle, spending there at least one evening in every week. As to the consistency of Dulcie's cordiality, he could not—once he had got over his surprise at it—entertain any doubt.

Occasionally he felt the impulse to analyze what measure of it belonged to him as the man, and what as the embodied embryo of the Scheme, which, it was clear, Dulcie was taking more and more to her heart as a personal ambition. But he refrained; he might dupe himself into an illusion which he would find harder to bear than his present uncertainty. He even restrained his wonder at her complete disregard of the confession he had let slip from him. That she knew what she knew was unquestionable; he might have ascribed her ignoring it to the almost childlike ingenuousness of her character, or even to an unconscious coquetry, which showed the eternal feminine in her. But he did neither. He reflected that, after all, what he had said was liable, if she wished it, to a perfectly colorless interpretation, and did not impose on her any definite attitude. Instead, he reserved his perplexity for the understanding he had imagined to exist between Dulcie and Phil. It was clear to him that their bearing to each other was not by any means in keeping with his original notion. At times he suspected that it was a one-sided state of things, that Dulcie's response was warmer than Phil actually gave occasion for. Leuw, however, had never probed his brother, for fear of hearing something to ratify his suspicion. And Leuw would have been mortified beyond all measure at having wormed his way into a secret which even in a woman of coarsest fibre should be hedged in with a sanctity of its own. In Dulcie he would have deprecated it more for his own sake than for hers. Pity looks down, not up; if he pitied her—how would he be able to do otherwise?—he would be poorer by an ideal. And that is a loss no

right-minded man sustains without at once fancying himself on the brink of moral bankruptcy.

And so Leuw, as far as his emotions were concerned, had done nothing but mark time. His will-power had kept him stationary, because in front of him stretched unreconnoitred ground. But for all that he could give himself no guarantee that his self-restraint would hold out as long as he needed it. Some unguarded moment he would break loose, more unequivocally than on the other occasion, and then she would have no choice but an absolute rift. And Leuw was determined, if he could not gain Dulcie's love, to reserve himself the consolation of what was next best to it—her friendship. To that the Scheme had already contributed largely; but, unless he strained his conscientiousness unduly, he need not shrink from exacting yet another service from it: to answer him the question whether or not something more was possible. While the Scheme was yet in its theoretic stage, it was natural that Dulcie's thoughts should narrow themselves down to her anticipation. It would be different once it had become an actuality. As fellow-workers they would find more numerous points of contact. They would feel the necessity for mutual encouragement; they would penetrate into one another's hearts, to assure themselves that conjecture of success in the one found a true echo in the other; soul would speak more confidentially to soul. If, then, and that within reasonable time, something that was its own revelation did not filter forth, he would know she had nothing to reveal.

The oracle to which Leuw thus looked for guidance was not so far distant as would appear. The

night before had brought him a suggestion which, he was certain, Phil would hail as nothing less than an inspiration. It was to the effect that the interval between then and the erecting of a permanent home for the Institute should be valuably occupied by setting on foot a preliminary organization in temporary premises, which no doubt could be readily found. And so, when it was to be transferred to its domicile proper, the work would have got beyond its tentative flounderings, and could at once begin to steer its course along the track of a well-established routine. Leuw smiled to himself as he thought of the avidity wherewith Phil would snatch at the idea. It made his heart glow to feel he was preparing for his brother a keen and unexpected pleasure. Since his return Leuw's feelings had quickened towards Phil beyond his liveliest expectations. To tell the truth, he had looked forward to the resumption of their intercourse with some apprehension. Their lines of life had been so divergent that what should have been a reunion might have turned into a clashing—a clashing of sentiments, external and fundamental. Leuw had pictured Phil as a typical man of the world, cynic, supercilious, superficial, and had feared that the tie of kinship could be kept intact only by skilful accommodation on his own part. His disappointment had been as great as it was gratifying. And then had come the Scheme, providentially it almost seemed, to put the seal on their understanding, and make it absolute. The possession it had taken of Phil not only surprised Leuw—it had sometimes frightened him. Since that night at Mrs. Duveen's, when they first let the secret of it out of their keeping, Phil had referred to it on all

occasions with an uncompromising obstinacy, as though he were vindicating it in the teeth of a fiercely resolute opposition. To Leuw's mind there seemed no call for it. Mr. Alexander had so far furnished no definite report concerning his mission, but it was obvious from his manner that he had no cause to be discontented with his results. Leuw looked on this mysterious aggressiveness of Phil's as the dogged perseverance which was exercising itself on imaginary obstacles, so as to be able to cope better with whatever real ones might arise. The thought touched and comforted Leuw. Be the outcome of the Scheme what it might, here was at least one other man beside himself ready and willing to put his very best into it, to make it the labor of his life, to concentrate on it faculties which would be a force in any other province. Indeed, the certainty of Phil's co-operation was so far the only surety of success the Scheme possessed. What, in truth, was the Scheme without Phil? And now that it had assumed for Leuw a momentous side-issue as well. . . .

He rose hurriedly as he heard Phil's quick, eager knock at the door. A glance at the flushed face and bright, restless eyes told Leuw that his brother had not brought to the discussion of the weighty question before them the calm, sober state of mind which it demanded.

"Any news?" he asked.

"Yes, Leuw, great news—it came this morning," replied Phil, the quietness of his tone throwing his general agitation into stronger relief. "Read this."

Leuw's vague hope that Phil had brought with him some important announcement affecting the fortunes of the Scheme fell to zero as Phil handed him an

official-looking document. Slowly he unfolded it, and ran through the contents as fast as his half-dazed brain allowed him to take in their meaning. What he read was this:

St. James'-in-the-East Radical and Liberal Association.
January 10th, 18—.

Philip Lipcott-Duveen, Esq.,

Dear Sir.—I am desired by the Council of the above Association to communicate to you the following extract from their minutes:

“Resolved, that in view of the impending retirement of Sir Saul Simmondson, Bart., M. P., from the representation of the St. James'-in-the-East division of the Tower Hamlets, Mr. Philip Lipcott-Duveen be approached to contest the seat at the forthcoming General Election in the Liberal and Radical interest.”

The Council wish me to add that they are fully convinced of your competence to reach the high standard of efficiency and popularity which has been made a precedent in this constituency by Sir Saul, who would find in you a worthy successor. It is also the opinion of the Council that, by the many-sidedness of your labors in this neighborhood as well as by your keenly sympathetic attitude on all questions industrial and economic, you have secured for yourself the suffrages of the workingmen, who form the majority of the divisional electors, and have thus placed the result of the contest beyond all doubt.

Awaiting the favor of your early reply,

I am, dear sir,

Yours faithfully,

HENRY T. TYLER,

Hon. Sec.

Phil was striding up and down the room, deep in his own thoughts. Presently he turned, and saw that Leuw had finished reading, and was staring absently before him.

"Well?" he asked expectantly.

"Oh, ah, yes," said Leuw, looking up at him like a man startled out of a deep sleep. "I congratulate you, Phil."

Phil gripped the proffered hand, and recommenced his striding, but his step seemed more buoyant.

"I can't say I expected it," he rattled on eagerly, "nor do I flatter myself that the offer is due entirely to my own deserts. I knew I was making for myself something of a name in the neighborhood, although I had no idea it would lead to anything. And I am certain it would not, if Sir Saul—you know he is Aunt's cousin by marriage—had not been there to put in a strong word for me."

"Then I suppose you will accept?" asked Leuw mechanically.

"Suppose?" echoed Phil with mingled surprise and reproach. "You surely don't expect me to let such a magnificent chance run to waste? I should have notified my acceptance by return of post, though it would have looked a little undignified. Only I remembered that, before actually doing so, I ought to assure myself formally of a certain something, even if I have every reason to consider that assurance a foregone conclusion."

Leuw did not enquire into the meaning of Phil's somewhat cryptic reference. He was dimly conscious that Phil had reasonable cause for taking umbrage at his utter lack of interest; but Phil evidently noticed nothing.

"By Jove, Leuw," he went on radiantly, "I can't help wondering at my luck. Here is a thing which, if I had struggled after it ever so hard, might never have got within my reach, and now drops into my lap like a ripe apple from a tree. I never thought it possible to take so much pride and pleasure in a prize a man hasn't worked for; it is enough to revolutionize all my ideas on the disciplinary value of putting one's hand to the plough. Still, I dare say you have something better to do than listen to my cheap moralist maunderings. So long, then; don't forget you are booked for Aunt's this evening."

He was about to hurry from the room, when he stopped abruptly, and stood fumbling with the door knob.

"Oh, by the way—really, I must be quite off my head with excitement," he said awkwardly. "About the Scheme, Leuw. Of course, it will be clear to you that I shall be unable to take any active part in it for the next six months or so, when I shall naturally have my hands full with the election campaign. After that I shall be once more at your disposal. We can hardly flatter ourselves that the trifling delay will result in hurrying on a crisis, can we?"

And nodding smilingly, he hastened out.

Leuw remained alone with a great emptiness in his heart. No wonder it felt so hollow; had not Phil taken everything out of it? It was even void of any trace of resentment against the despoiler. Leuw had retained enough presence of mind to see that to blame a man for acting humanly was to pick a quarrel with God. What else was he to expect but that Phil should be dazzled by the glitter of his splendid opportunity?

Perhaps if it had not flashed on him so suddenly, he might have had time to shut his eyes to the temptation, to collect himself, and remember the duty he owed to his purpose. As it was, he could hardly be called a renegade.

So Leuw made excuses to himself for Phil, feeling glad that the brotherly love on which he had congratulated himself just before had survived the supreme test to which it had been put. He forgave him everything. He forgave the niggardly apology which Phil had tendered him for throwing over the Scheme like old lumber, and which Leuw might have regarded as a personal slight. He forgave the perfunctory promise Phil had held out to him—as it were for a sop—a promise that was self-contradictory on the face of it. Was it not obvious that the stress of Phil's parliamentary duties must preclude the idea of his identifying himself, whole or even part, with the fortunes of the Scheme?

Yes, the Scheme was dead—dead ere its birth. One question seemed to stare at him wherever he looked: what would Dulcie say? For answer it came home to him what else the death of the Scheme meant for himself. It meant . . . But no; he was not going back on his word. He had forgiven his brother Phil, and there the matter ended. Phil had chosen to wash his hands of the obligations that called to him. So Leuw would have to work for the two of them, in order to make good the other's dereliction and retrieve the family honor. That he could not carry out what he had set his heart on, was no reason why he should fold his hands idly, despondently. There were many things he could do; and—Phil or no Phil—he would do them.

He took up his hat, and went into the open. But though he thought he had gathered in his reins of self-control as short as possible, never had the streets roared so loudly—never had they flaunted so boldly their stony pitilessness for souls in travail.

CHAPTER XXVI

PHIL's errand lay towards St. John's Wood. His buoyancy prompted a journey on foot thither, while his impatience counseled a cab. The latter carried the day, much to Phil's eventual satisfaction, for just as he got to the house, he found Mrs. Duveen on the point of sallying out for a morning call.

"What has happened?" she asked, catching both his hands in hers.

"Nothing much—only this," laughed Phil, as disengaging one hand he held out to her the letter from the Association.

"A surprise, isn't it?" he said gleefully, watching her face light up.

"Not altogether," she replied, resuming once more possession of both his hands. "Sir Saul warned me the other day that I would shortly hear of 'something to your advantage,' though I had no idea it would be this."

"I am keeping you," said Phil with some anxiety.

"Not in the least; you are much more important than my call," replied Mrs. Duveen, quickly untying her bonnet-strings. "Come, sit down here, and talk about it."

"That is what I very much want to," said Phil soberly. "Is—is Dulcie in?"

"No, she would not let the fine, dry day slip by without her bicycle-spin."

Phil looked relieved. "Because I don't want any-

body to interrupt us for ten minutes or so," he explained apologetically.

"Quick, tell me," came from Mrs. Duveen.

"The fact of the matter is I cannot accept this invitation without your consent," said Phil resolutely.

"Without my consent?" Mrs. Duveen smiled incredulously.

"That is what it comes to, Aunt. A parliamentary career means certain expenses, both before and after the election, and at present I could not dream of taking these on myself."

"Ah!" breathed Mrs. Duveen.

"The very moment the offer reached me, I made up my mind to come and ask for your help, ask it of my own accord, instead of beating about the bush, and waiting till you found out, and came to make advances yourself. I wanted, in a way, to retrieve myself for having done that so often. Whenever you showed yourself ready to do me a favor, I in a way resented it, and then in the end gave in with a bad grace, which must have made you feel you were accepting the favor instead of conferring it. This time I don't want to run the risk of putting you in such a false position."

"Don't say that, Phil," entreated Mrs. Duveen.

"But I will say it, and more too," disobeyed Phil.

"I want to let you see how thoroughly I know you. Not only have I made up my mind to ask you for your help, but I am prepared to stand or fall by your answer. It is through you, and you alone, that I have come to the point where I can take this great leap; and therefore it is due to you, as your sole and incontestable right, to do me this final, this culminat-

ing service. I might have asked it of my brother Leuw, and I know I should not have been refused. But—I say it again—I shall take it from you, or not at all. If it is out of your will or out of your power . . .”

“Phil, it is neither—believe me, Phil, it is neither,” broke in Mrs. Duveen with almost pitiful eagerness. “Oh, you don’t know how glad and proud you have made me feel.”

Phil came over to her, and stood looking into the kind, moist eyes uplifted to his. It was some seconds before he spoke again.

“Thank you, dear, thank you. I will not be so mean as to deceive you. It was because I was so sure of you that I did not hesitate to break down my bridges—I mean, that I resolved to approach no one else after you. As it is, I wish to suggest a compromise. I want the money not as a gift, but as a loan. It is ridiculous of me to think of returning to you in cold coin all I have actually cost you. But I must begin somewhere. Everybody tells me my prospects at the bar are good. And after all I am selfish enough to wish to safeguard my feelings. This is not a matter entirely between ourselves. It would not do me any good to go about with the idea that I am robbing Dulcie.”

“Robbing Dulcie? With Bram to look after her?”

“It would be useless and ungracious of me to pursue the subject any further just now; only I reserve myself the right to my own thoughts. Once more, then, many, many thanks.”

And this time his lips did more than speak his gratitude.

Then he resumed immediately.

"But I am not done with you yet."

"I don't want you to be, dear," was the smiling reply.

"I don't know whether you will be equally pleased."

"Still, I shall risk hearing you. Is it again a matter of my consent?"

"Perhaps you will think it ought to be," said Phil, his eyes seeking the ground; "but even if you do, I cannot possibly leave it to your discretion. It is something I must take into my own hands, and my telling you so is as much as you can expect."

"You mean Effie?" said Mrs. Duveen quickly.

Phil looked at her startled and anxious. "How do you know?"

"You foolish boy, how could I help knowing? Everybody knows."

"Do you—do you think Effie does?" quavered Phil.

Mrs. Duveen sat up in her surprise.

"Surely you are not serious in asking me that?" she demanded.

"Why not? If you gauged my feelings so correctly, why not hers?"

"And you mean to imply that you have not assured yourself on that point?"

"If I had, there would be no need for me to do so now. I did think at one time that I could draw certain conclusions; but of late I have become a little doubtful."

"I can't understand it—it seems so strange," mused Mrs. Duveen.

Phil deliberated. Should he explain her the mystery? His intention had ever been to keep it under cover, for his telling of it must needs involve a certain amount of self-glorification. But then again he considered she would probably lose sight of that in the delight which the revelation would bring to her. And she had been so good to him that to refrain from giving her every particle of joy it was in his power to give seemed a downright act of despoliation. . . .

And so he told her—told her nearly in the very words he had repeated to himself the evening he conned his diary to take stock of things as they were—how he had held back from Effie, because he wanted Mrs. Duveen to retain her claim on him unshared, unchallenged, as long as he could let her do so without fatally injuring his chances for what he considered an essential in the economy of his future. And now the time had come, and he dared not tarry any longer.

He had not miscalculated his results. With a little cry of exultation Mrs. Duveen hurried up to him, and laid her hands on both his shoulders; there was an air of benediction in the gesture.

“And then you talk to me of loans instead of gifts?” she asked with a reproachfulness that was more tender than a caress. “I should, indeed, be a hard creditor, if after this I did not make you out a quittance in full. Phil, Phil, I wish I could summon up heart to scold you. How dare you think I should demand from you such a sacrifice? You should have distinguished, for my sake, between generosity and extravagance. We have—that is, you have—spoken too, too often of the give-and-take there has been between us. Please, Phil, promise this will be the last

time; your mere hinting at it again would shame me unutterably."

"I hoped it would make us a little more even," replied Phil simply.

"Say a little more than even, and you will be right. And now I am going to make good to you the balance—with nothing more than a piece of womanly advice. Don't let Effie guess that the reason for your—your dilatoriness was your consideration for another woman, or I should not answer for the consequences. I say it, not because she is Effie, but because I know my sex."

"That is harsh criticism," smiled Phil. "But, seriously, I had thought of that already. Don't be afraid, though; I am not going to approach the woman I am asking to be my wife with a lie. The reason I have prepared for her is equally honest."

"Well, let it be any reason but the one you gave me," iterated Mrs. Duveen. "When will you see her?"

"I expect to find her at home now."

"Then go. You know my good wishes go with you."

As Phil walked down the half length of street which separated Mrs. Duveen's house from that of Mrs. Elkin, there came upon him an access of regret that he had not made the latter his first destination. He grew unpleasantly conscious that the high-mettled, almost truculent self-satisfaction with which he had started forth in the morning had somehow taken to itself a leakage. There was a flabbiness, a want of tone in his mood, which disconcerted him by its alarming inadequacy to the purpose in hand. And

yet, there had been nothing in his interview with Mrs. Duveen but what was strong, inspiriting; it ought to have acted on him like an astringent. And then he knew. If the cause did not lie in the past, it must lie in the future. It was quite true. He was going forward to meet, not an unquestionable certainty, but an issue veiled in doubt. It was Effie's ambiguous behavior during the past few months which was demoralizing him. He had tried to puzzle it out more than once; but each time he had got no further than ascribing it to a whim, a humor, which, from his knowledge of her, might pain, but not perplex him. And now it came on him as an inspiration, which caught his breath, that it might mean something else, something vitally, mortally, different from his conjecture. His fear grew to a frenzy; he almost ran the last few yards.

"Oh, it's you?" said Effie looking up languidly from her writing-table as he entered.

"It is," he replied rather lamely.

She made no move to shake hands. "Mother is taking it easy this morning; she has a bit of a headache," continued Effie.

"I am very sorry," said Phil.

Effie ignored his sympathy. "Which means I can't practice, because she says she can feel me playing even though she can't hear me. I don't know whether to take it as a compliment or not. So I am bringing my correspondence a little more up to date."

"Am I interrupting you?"

"Not particularly. Sit down. What are you doing in the neighborhood at this time of the day?"

"I called at Aunt's," he replied dully. Her cold,

matter-of-fact reception had made him effervesce utterly. He felt all dregs.

Effie made some commonplace enquiries concerning Mrs. Duveen and Dulcie, and there was a pause.

"You seem busier than ever at the piano lately," said Phil finally.

"All people have their hobbies—I don't see why I should be an exception," she rejoined with an irritation he could not understand. There was a second pause. Phil attempted to tide it over by prodding a piece of coal perilously overhanging the grate back into safety.

"Do you want to go on with your letters?" he asked without facing round on her.

"I think I shall, if you continue to be so entertaining."

Phil pulled himself together. He could not let this go on. This was how most of their conversation had of late got to assume its strained tone. But to let it reach tension point to-day was, perhaps, to create a situation which might prove irretrievable. Gently Phil laid down the fire-iron, rose, and stood suppliantly before her.

"Effie, I want you," he pleaded in a whisper.

She rose also, retreated a step or two, startled and confused.

"Want me? What for?"

"For myself, Effie. Don't you understand?"

She made no reply, but walked up to the window, where she stood drumming a tattoo. Presently she turned round to him.

"Why did you not come before?" she asked as though she were enquiring for the hour of the day.

He had thought himself well-prepared for the question, he had expected it; and yet, now that it was put, it took him like an ambush.

"Effie, am I too late, am I?" he cried wretchedly.

"I asked you why you did not come before," she repeated.

"Because I had nothing to bring you—except myself, and I was afraid that would not be enough for you," was the answer, eagerly obedient. "What indeed had I to show you? Petty little successes, trifling triumphs, which in the aggregate came to nothing. It was all promise, no achievement. And I remembered how ambitious you were for me. Two months ago I thought I was giving you earnest that I meant great things by letting you know of the Scheme, mine and Leuw's. You did not think so; you flouted it. And because you flouted it, I took it to my heart all the more strenuously, insisted on it with more and more emphasis, hoping to convince you in the end that its greatness was scope enough for any man. And I should have gone on trying till I had succeeded. But now I can offer you something else—something you will consider greater, because in its way it is more self-evident. Listen, Effie, to what occurred this morning. Oh, why do you make me feel I am talking to deaf ears?"

"I beg your pardon; I did not know you wanted me to adopt a gape-mouthed attitude."

And she was about to settle herself back in her chair, when a quick, impulsive movement lifted her up again, and the next moment he felt her arms about his neck, and her cheek pressed close to his.

"Phil, my Phil," she murmured, "I tried with all

my strength to be hard and cold and distant to you, but I can't—I can't Phil; don't tell me what happened this morning—at least not before I have told you I want you too, that I want you not for what you do, but for what you are. Have you heard me say that, Phil?"

"Yes, dear, I have heard it."

"And now, what did happen this morning? Quick, Phil."

And with words that tripped and stumbled over each other in hot-footed eagerness, he poured his story upon her. And then when he had finished, she made him go through it again so that she could count every word. Finally she made him produce the letter. Then she was satisfied.

"And now let us keep perfectly quiet for five minutes, so that I can tell myself you love me," she laughed.

But she did not keep very good count of time, for almost immediately her tongue was at work again.

"Phil, darling, I am terribly disappointed. Look at the bold, broad, glaring day outside."

He cast a half-frightened glance through the window. Then, thinking he had caught her drift, he answered smilingly:

"Well, dearest, let it glare. We shan't let it glare us out of countenance, shall we?"

And with beaming defiance he availed himself of his new-found privileges.

She put him from her gently. "Oh, you dear stupid, I didn't mean that. I meant that I had always imagined this picture in a different setting."

"And what was your setting, dear?"

"Certainly not this horribly prosy, methodical room, with the sun staring in rudely inquisitive. I thought it would be some wild, grand, boldly jutting crag, standing all alone along the coast, like a proud outcast, with the organ-boom of the incoming tide mounting up from below and the soft moonlight playing on it pityingly above. . . ."

"And extremely convenient for jumping over in case you said 'no,'" added Phil jestingly.

"Don't," she said, clapping her hand to his mouth. "What a shame! Now you have taken all the sentiment out of it. But never mind, dear; we will talk sense instead. Do you think I have nothing to tell you?"

"Yes, indeed, dear," he said gravely. "You have to tell me why you maltreated me so horribly, when—when you really didn't want to."

"No, I didn't want to, only you made me. I was waiting—waiting, and you stood as far off as ever. What was I to think? What but that you fancied you could keep trailing me like a poor fish which had bitten on to the hook, and that you could pull me in when you thought you were getting tired of the sport? And that made me angry—oh, so angry. And besides, I felt people were looking questions at me, and I dared not even shrug my shoulders, and say: I don't know. So, instead, I had to make believe I didn't care. When it came to a struggle between my feelings and my pride, I could not have any doubt which was to win, could I, dear?"

"I suppose you had to do as you thought right," he said soothingly.

"And all this time you were paying me the highest

tribute a man can pay a woman—you did not think yourself good enough for me,” she went on, her self-reproach getting the upper hand of her. “But, Phil, we both had a narrow escape; had you waited a little longer, we might have lost each other for always.”

He paled visibly. “Then there was another man?” he said fiercely.

“Not one man, but many, and women too, for the matter of that. In fact, Phil, the world might have taken me from you.”

“Don’t play at riddles, Effie, dear,” he begged earnestly.

“Wait a moment,” she said, proceeding to unlock a little drawer in the writing table. “I kept it here, right under mother’s nose, where she would not think of looking for contraband,” she added half laughing.

Phil saw little cause for amusement; he saw still less as he glanced through the stamped and signed agreement, in which it appeared that a certain somebody contracted with Miss Effie Elkin for a series of twelve concerts during the months of March, April, and May.

“What made you do this?” he asked, looking at her aghast.

“You did, dear. I had to go in for something to take me out of myself. I was willing to sink my own ambition in yours; but when I saw you made no call for the sacrifice, it would have been wasteful not to utilize it for my own self, would it not, dear?”

“And what are you going to do now?” he asked, ignoring her point.

“I shall do what you tell me.”

"No, no, don't leave it to me. Speak for yourself," he said quickly.

"Ah! there it is—the inveterate conceit of you men. You want to hear from my own lips that I give up everything for you. Well, then, if it will please you—I do give up everything."

"Don't put it like that," he entreated joyously. "Say you are transferring it."

"Look what a lot of appreciating you will have to do to make up for the world," she smiled, not perhaps without a tinge of regret.

"I am not afraid of the magnitude of the task, dear. Tear up that," he said, pointing to the contract with sudden resentment.

"Oh, no, let me keep it, as a memento."

"Your wishes are mine," he replied with gallant tenderness.

"Phil, I am only beginning to feel how glad I am about your going into Parliament. It seems such a big thing—big enough to accommodate your and my ambitions comfortably. I don't think the Scheme would have done that, however sanguine you may have been of persuading me to the contrary. I have a sort of instinctive grudge against it, perhaps because, when I first heard of it, the thought uppermost in my mind was that it would take you further and further away from me. And you are going to do well, very well, are you not?"

"How could I help it, with you at my side?"

"And another thing, Phil, dear. You owe me some reparation for your—your aggravating conduct."

"Effie, anything you ask," he broke in eagerly.

"Ah! you think I am going to impose on you some heroic penance, do you?" she laughed. "Don't flatter yourself—I am not going to honor you so signally. It only means gratifying a foolish whim of mine. Don't give away our secret for—say, a week."

"And what about you?"

"I can tell whomever I like. That will, in a way, be giving me the start of you."

"It isn't so easy a penance as you think," he said half ruefully.

"I see," she laughed delightedly, "because it touches your vanity. You want to start bragging about your conquest."

Half an hour passed.

"Well, is this as good as the cliff by moonlight?" whispered Phil.

"Better. There is no chance of your jumping over."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE comparative solitude with which Leuw hedged himself that day did nothing to wear the edge off the disappointment the morning had brought him. And so he looked forward with greater satisfaction to spending the evening at Mrs. Duveen's, hoping that the congenial atmosphere of the house would be more effective in making him once more master over himself. Moreover, he was dogged by an irresistible curiosity to ascertain how Dulcie regarded the new development of things. He took care to indulge in no extravagant hopes; Phil's defection had prepared him for anything. He tutored himself into equanimity at hearing her join in the chorus of gratification as loudly as the rest. Perhaps he ought to feel grateful for the timely reminder that the dwellers of this earth were not yet qualified to change places with the angels; also that illusions which one hugs to oneself very tightly are liable to get crushed out of shape. But his heart rebelled nevertheless.

He left the office at six, and, not being due at St. John's Wood till half past eight—he generally preferred to get there after dinner—he had ample time for calling back at home in order to press Mrs. Lipcott to accompany him; she had not been quite sure in the morning whether she would care to. As he got near the turning off the Mile End Road, he stopped and faced round in response to a detaining hand he suddenly felt upon his shoulder.

"Excuse me, sir, aren't you Leuw Lipcott?"

Leuw looked hard at the enquirer, a sallow, narrow-chested young man, dressed in rather nondescript fashion, but with an unmistakable attempt at keeping up appearances.

"Yellow Joe, isn't it?" asked Leuw in turn.

"And no mistake about the yellow, eh?" was the reply, accompanied by a thin, hollow laugh.

"I am sorry you met me," said Leuw seriously.

"Are you? Well, we can soon put that right again. Good evening."

"Here, don't be a fool," cried Leuw, taking a step after him and catching him by the arm. Joe stopped obediently.

"I mean, because by meeting me you have cut the ground from under my feet," continued Leuw. "I had made up my mind to hunt you up one day this week. I couldn't before; I was too busy."

"Then you hadn't forgotten me?"

"You'll have to be satisfied with my word for it now. Good God, man alive, what has become of your shoulders?"

"I don't know, but the man I work for measures fifty-five round the waist," replied Joe with apparent unconcern.

"Tell me all about yourself."

"You'll only waste your time by listening. Have another look at me instead."

"No, no, you won't get out of it that way."

"Since you are so pressing," said Joe with mock politeness, "by the way, I don't like pressing. That's what did for me. You know which I mean—across the damp cloth, one iron on, the other off, sixteen

hours a day. And one fine morning I feel there's a hitch in my inside machinery, which meant I was going the same way father had gone—a very bad way, if you remember. So I thought I'd get out of that workshop before they came with the stretcher."

"Which was very wise of you," remarked Leuw, rather superfluously.

"I couldn't afford to be foolish; there were eight of them at home to pay for it, if I were. Hospital's a cheaper place to go to than heaven. When I got out again, I took a leaf out of your book, and with what I scraped, borrowed, and begged, went into shop-keeping."

"And?" prompted Leuw.

"Got out of it nearly as quick. Everybody can't be as lucky—I beg pardon, I meant to say, as clever—as Leuw Lipcott. Good job, too."

"What do you mean by that, Joe?"

"I mean that some of us, that is to say, some of our people, have got to be failures. The world's jealous enough of us as it is. If we were all successful, or at least more of us than are, it might, one of these days, put us into a sack and drown us in the Red Sea."

"And so you were content to sacrifice yourself for the good of the rest," said Leuw—he did not know himself whether in jest or earnest. A great truth seemed latent somewhere in Joe's theory.

"Sacrifice is too big a word to use with a small man like me," replied the latter, "but it was a very good idea to have about me when the blue devils came on."

"It ought to be patented, I think," said Leuw.

"What are you doing now?"

"Getting quizzed, it looks like."

"No."

The monosyllable, masterful in its brevity, cowed and convinced Joe.

"That was six years ago," he resumed. "Then I tried you again."

"Tried me again?"

"Your advice, that is. 'Keep up your handwriting and figures, Joe,' do you remember that? Well, I remembered. You wouldn't say a thing if there was nothing in it. There was. A capmaker, in a fair way of business, wanted somebody to keep his books. He's a very good-natured man—he has to be because of his fifty-five inches round the waist—but he knows I am not keen on putting my services up for auction. He doesn't say he knows, but he conveys it to me gently in the salary he pays me. He's so very considerate; the reproachful way he shakes his head each time I ask him for a rise is simply heart-breaking. But I don't mind. The youngsters have nearly all learnt to shift for themselves, and fifteen shillings a week will be enough for what's left of me."

"I'll tell you something, Joe. You've paid me the compliment of taking my advice, and you haven't done very well with it."

"I'd have done much worse without it," interrupted Joe.

"That isn't the point. If I don't want to look a fool, I've got to see that you do better. There's a desk waiting for you at my office. Give that old pot-belly of yours notice."

"I needn't. He never would give me an agreement. I'll be at your place nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"That's business-like. Here's the address."

Joe took the card and looked at it. "So you are in the City?" he asked with curious eagerness.

Leuw nodded.

"Then I suppose I had better come in a top hat?"

"It's just as well you did. Any objection?"

"Objection?" answered Joe his face lighting up. "Why, it always was the dream of my life to walk about the streets in a chimney-pot."

"Well then, wait till the summer comes," laughed Leuw.

"That's all right—I'm used to doing things in the sweat of my brow," said Joe dryly. "To-morrow at nine, then, and in a top hat."

He was making off, when a sudden thought stopped him.

"I'll thank you for this when I've got my wits back a bit, and can do it decently," he said under his breath. And then his feelings evidently got the better of him, for, with a preliminary jump, he doubled off as fast as his legs could carry him.

Leuw gazed after him with a quiet smile on his lips. Then he pursued his course more briskly, not so much to make up for lost time, but because he had gathered new motive power. It was the knowledge that the day, after all, had not passed by entirely futile and profitless.

He found his mother awaiting him impatiently.

"I don't understand it at all—I mean about Phil," were her first words to him.

"Ah, then you know."

"He dashed up this morning in a cab and told me. . . ."

"So he was at least decent enough for that," muttered Leuw.

"What's that you are saying?"

"Oh, yes, it's quite true. He's going in for Parliament."

"What, the real Parliament, where they govern the country?"

"Yes, mother. But I've got news for you, too."

"Have you?" There was more fear than curiosity in the enquiry.

"We must pack up here and quit."

"But why?"

"We've got to get into a bigger house and a more fashionable neighborhood."

"But you said all along that you wouldn't. We weren't going to make any show, and just keep on living quietly down here as if—as if nothing had happened. And besides you wanted to remain on the spot, so that you could look better after the Scheme when it was started. . . ."

"Quite right, mother, I did say so. But Phil has changed all that. You see, now that we are going to have an M. P. in the family, we are compelled to put on a little more style, if only to keep up the dignity of the country. Don't look so frightened, mother. You will soon get used to the footman."

"Footman? What are you thinking of, Leuw?"

"Well, we will do without one," smiled Leuw. "But I can't let you off the big house."

"Leuw, Leuw—if only your father were alive to help me carry all this greatness," cried Mrs. Lipcott. "You don't know how it frightens me. I am beginning to distrust the future."

"Distrust the future by all means; everybody should. Trust me instead, mother," said Leuw, his hand on her shoulder.

"Can I?" She looked up at him wistfully. "You know, Leuw, my greatest fear I haven't yet told you of. I scarcely dare to."

"Is it so terrible as all that?"

"Yes, because it refers to something I desire with all my heart, and still can't think of without quaking inwardly. Leuw, one of these days you will—I hope you will—be giving me a daughter. I dare say she will be a woman who is born to the life which I shall be struggling to master as a child struggles with its lessons. And she may not understand me and my ways. What then, Leuw?"

"Then I shall be there to explain you to her. But it won't be necessary. I would make sure that the daughter I gave you would be content to take you as you were, and measure you by your own standard."

"I know one who would do that. If I could have my choice, Leuw. . . ."

"Yes?" asked Leuw quickly.

"I was hoping I would have no need to tell you her name—that you would know yourself."

"What I do know is, that at present I haven't the time for guessing it," said Leuw, looking hastily at his watch. The subterfuge would not have deceived a babe in arms, but Mrs. Lipcott let it pass unchallenged. "If you are coming, mother, you must get ready at once," continued Leuw.

"No, thank you, Leuw. I would rather stop in—especially after what you have told me. I want to see as much of this house as I can, while I have the

chance. I passed many a sad and anxious hour in it, and that's why it has grown so dear to me."

When Leuw arrived at St. John's Wood, he found himself balked in his expectations of spending a quiet evening. Mrs. Duveen had made no secret of the distinction offered to Phil, and the result was an impromptu gathering of the more intimate friends of the house eager to tender their congratulations. Leuw noticed, somewhat to his surprise, that Phil still maintained the exultant mood of the morning; the lapse of the day should have been sufficient to bring him back to a more neutral condition of mind. And then again Leuw reflected that it was as unfair to blame Phil for not having become sobered, as it would be to blame himself for having been unable to drag himself out of the slough of his despondency. What he regretted was that his errand here would be fruitless; there seemed little chance of taking away with him the solace he so urgently needed. As Phil's brother, or it might have been on his own merits, he came in for a good deal of attention; he succeeded in keeping up an equable demeanor, but the strain tried him cruelly. He would have taken his leave after the first half-hour; but he could not tear himself away without a word or two to Dulcie. He had an idea that she reciprocated his wish; at least, he caught various glances of hers in his direction which might be construed so. A garrulous old lady had taken possession of her, and was pounding away at her mercilessly. Even from where he stood, Leuw could notice that Dulcie's attention was only perfunctory; occasionally she looked distinctly distressed; no doubt, garrulous old ladies were very trying. More for Dulcie's sake than his own, he wished this particular one—to bed.

But he waited on. His impression seemed to have been correct. The moment her tormentor rose to go, Dulcie came straight up to him.

"I haven't had a chance of congratulating you," she said.

"Oh, about Phil? Thank you. But you are equally entitled to congratulations."

"So others have thought. I accept them."

She looked about her sharply. They were fairly out of everybody's hearing. A sudden change came over her face.

"No, I won't accept them from you," she broke out with bated vehemence. "I have had enough of pretending to the others—mother and all. But I must speak out to somebody. I don't think it is anything to feel glad about. He ought not to have taken the invitation. He ought to have waited—waited till he had made proper headway with what had a previous claim on him. Oh, he has disappointed me terribly, first on account of the Scheme, and secondly on account of himself—at least, I hardly know which to put first and which second. I never thought Phil could do anything which he would have to live down in my estimate of him. And now I have come out with it all you can scold me as much as you like. But I suppose you are so proud of him that nothing I could think or say would make a pin's head of difference."

"Miss Duveen," said Leuw softly, "your need of a confidant must have been very great indeed, when you come to me, of all people. Wasn't I least likely to give your complaint a patient hearing?"

"If I have hurt you—I retract—I retract every word. Oh, I am so very sorry. . . ."

"And I am very glad," he interrupted quickly, "for now I need not scruple to ask you for a return service. I, too, have confidences to make."

"About what?"

"About the same subject as yours. I deserve congratulations on Phil's account as little as you have just told me you do."

"Then you, too, think he has done wrong?" she asked.

"That is where I must differ from you. He has not done wrong; he has simply done otherwise than I expected him to."

"Of course, you must defend him; he is your brother," she said bitterly.

"He has certain claims on your indulgence, too," Leuw reminded her. "No, Miss Duveen, I should make the same allowances for anybody else's brother. My only grievance against him is that he has ignored what after all is only a personal predilection of mine. I revenge myself on him sufficiently by not feeling unconditionally glad of what he has given his preference to."

"A generous revenge—but oh, it is such a pity—the Scheme."

"Then be also generous; make allowances for. . . ."

"Very well, I do," she said quickly. "What have I to take umbrage at? He hasn't wronged me. I beg his pardon. I was very presumptuous."

"No, don't say it like that. Remember, you might have hurt me by talking of my brother as having to live things down."

She looked at him. "After that I can have no alternative," she replied. "Mr. Lipcott, I say it without

afterthought: Phil of to-day is to me the Phil of yesterday. But it is such a pity, the Scheme," came her murmur, like a refrain. "I suppose it is dead?"

"It seems so," answered Leuw, shaking his head.

"It may have a resurrection. If it has not, it will at least be more fortunate than a great many men and things. It will leave one sincere mourner."

"Two," she corrected him reproachfully.

"Two—I beg your pardon; but you know the selfishness of sorrow. And then, to tell the truth, I gave you the opening purposely."

"What for? To test me?"

He did not answer, but stood smiling at her, his heart in his mouth.

"I thought I had given you enough assurance of my sympathy through good and ill," was her reply.

But not her whole reply, nor even the essential part of it. That was contained in the strange glance she flashed at him from eyes that immediately became downcast again. The sense of suddenness and brilliance had on Leuw all the effect of lightning. It had taken him so unawares that the very next instant left him in doubt whether or not anything unusual had occurred. And so he stopped dumb and strained, waiting for a possible repetition, and all alert to seize on it with the full force of his perceptiveness. But chance was against him.

"I really can't stop a moment longer—you know I promised mother to be back early," said Effie, breaking in on them—so it appeared to Leuw—from somewhere out of space.

"I shall go with you for your things," replied Dulcie instantly.

Leuw somehow did not regret the interruption so very keenly. It had probably saved him from making himself absurd in one way or another.

Dulcie had reached her room, and, looking back, found that her companion had only got half-way up the staircase—a reversal of the usual order of things.

“What’s the matter, Eff?” she asked as soon as the other was level with her. “You seem to have been sleep-walking all the evening.”

Effie followed her in, deliberately closed the door, and sat down on the couch.

“Lucky for your visitors I did,” replied Effie dispassionately. “If I had not bottled myself up so safely—rammed the cork in as tight as I could, I should have been nothing short of a scandal.”

“What, dumps again?” queried Dulcie solicitously.

For answer Effie threw herself back and began to laugh—not a laugh of amusement, but a series of ominous, hiccougging giggles. Dulcie, after the first shock, recovered her presence of mind, snatched at the smelling salts, and applied them.

“Eff, dear, you mustn’t be foolish,” she reproved, watching anxiously for the result.

“It isn’t foolishness,” said Effie, with a long breath of relief; “it’s only reaction.”

“Reaction after what?”

“After the bottling. I made him promise not to tell any one for a week, and that I might if I wanted to, and then it seemed like taking an unfair advantage, and so I was going to keep the secret with him, and it nearly killed me. You see, I couldn’t even tell mother, because when she has one of her nervous headaches on the doctor says she mustn’t be excited. But some-

body had to know, and failing mother it was, of course, you."

"Oh, Eff, I do hope it's Phil."

"You goose, who else do you think it could be?"

"Oh, you dear. Mind you scream, if I hurt you."

The embrace was, indeed, a frantic one, but Effie stood it like a Spartan.

"I don't see why you should think I have done such a clever thing," she said, as she finally stepped up to the looking-glass to attend to her ruffled curls. "When there's only one man in the world, it wants very little discrimination to pick him out."

"Only one man? That's a very poor outlook for us that are left," laughed Dulcie, but not very heartily.

Effie shrugged her shoulders. "I can't help that. One has to be selfish occasionally, just to remind oneself of one's own value."

"Still, I suppose every woman thinks she is selfish—in your way, that is—when she gains her 'only one man,'" hazarded Dulcie.

"They can console themselves with that, if they like," said Effie magnanimously. "I'm not going to trouble about other women, at least not for the present."

"Not even about me?" asked Dulcie rather piteously.

"You? You aren't a woman; you are only a child."

"Effie, I also thought I was; I hoped so, at any rate. But I have rather come to doubt it lately."

Effie scrutinized her keenly. Then she asked. "What makes you doubt it?"

"Effie," said Dulcie timidly, "you won't mind my

asking you for a certain piece of information, will you?"

"Certainly not; but I warn you I am very ignorant."

"No, no, you must know all about it there is to know. How—how did you find out you were getting fond of Phil?"

"Oh, you want to know the symptoms. I could have told you them off pat last night, but I have been hard at work all day to forget them. You see, they are rather painful. Still, the principal one was a violent sense of absent-bodiedness; my chief thought about everything I did was that he wasn't there to see me do it. I was getting to feel so incomplete that I was afraid to be alone with myself; I fancied there was only half of me—what's that you are mumbling?"

"It fits," repeated Dulcie a little more loudly. "The symptom, I mean," she added.

"What, you've been at it as well—feeling incomplete? How dared you?" exclaimed Effie, her manner fierce and threatening, but her grasp of Dulcie's hand very soothing and gentle. And then a light dawned on her. "It isn't—yes, it is—it must be that Leuw boy. Fancy, child—you and I sisters-in-law; won't it be heavenly?"

Dulcie looked at her aghast and agonized. "Effie, how can you let your tongue run away with you like that? I haven't said a word. . . ."

"Quite right, too—I should have been very much shocked if you had. Remember I am semi-qualified for playing propriety. Has he said anything, though?"

"No—yes—that is, I believe he as much as hinted."

"Did he? That's good. A hint from him, I should

say, is as valid as a written declaration from most other people. I never came across a man who reminded me so much of a strong-box with an intricate combination lock."

"And he may not have given me the right key," murmured Dulcie. "Effie, what if I have been wrong after all?"

"Yes, there is that danger," admitted Effie. "It's a very humiliating thing to say, but we'll keep it strictly to ourselves: we women aren't really half so clever as they give us credit for. I nearly made a mistake myself. But there, I'm a nice Job's comforter, am I not?"

"Less of a comforter, but more of a friend. You might have buoyed me up instead of warning me. Your own happiness did not make you lose sight of mine. But Eff—Eff—Effie. . . ."

"If you start crying, I shall simply go off into the most terrific fit of hysterics you ever saw," threatened Effie.

That averted a catastrophe, and Dulcie's handkerchief returned to its pocket.

"You mustn't let out you know about Phil and me—not even to Phil himself," enjoined Effie, putting on her gloves. "I think I can hold out for the week now all right."

"Wouldn't it be better if you annulled the condition?" asked Dulcie uneasily.

"Perhaps so; I'm sorry myself I made it. But you don't want me to make Phil think he's marrying a weather-vane?"

"No," said Dulcie dubiously.

Phil and Leuw were waiting in the hall to escort Effie home.

"I have not asked you how you got on to-day," whispered Mrs. Duveen to Phil. "I could see without."

"Hush," Phil smiled back, "I mustn't tell yet; but you may think whatever you like."

Leuw could not help overhearing their colloquy. Mysteries, mysteries everywhere; the world was full of them. But his own was the greatest of all, and its name was—Dulcie,

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE fire crackled merrily in the grate, and Mrs. Diamond busily cracked nuts in the arm-chair. Mr. Diamond was going through his usual Friday evening task of reading aloud to his wife the contents of the "Jewish Examiner" from cover to cover, down to the very advertisements. Mrs. Diamond believed in getting full value for her money. Mr. Diamond's style of reading inclined to the monotonous rather than the intensely dramatic—a thing not to be wondered at in a hard-worked man, on whom, for the time being at least, the sitting-room couch exercised a much more powerful fascination than the most epoch-making of communal events. Even his wife's rousing capacity, which, in its way, was not inferior to that of a fair-sized Leyden-jar battery, had occasionally hard work to keep him from dozing off in the middle of a psychological moment. As the years had slipped on, Mr. Diamond had become a more and more devout believer in the "peace-at-any-price" policy. He had found it necessary, because the increasing length of his union with Mrs. Diamond had not resulted in a corresponding lengthening of her temper. But, though apparently he had made concession a fine art, any one catching a glimpse of his soul, would have shrunk back affrighted at the depth to which the deceptiveness of appearances could sink. For there, at the bottom of that same soul, Mr. Diamond's, to wit, an undreamt of desire had taken root, germinated, and

grown to ripeness—the desire to have things all his own way at least once during his married life. He felt that this was due, if not to himself, at least to the other members of his sex, whose claim to the lordship of creation he had done more than any other man living to undermine. Of course, he knew that, should the worst come to the worst, he would, in a way, retrieve himself at the ultimate moment of his earthly existence, when he would follow the call of the Destroying Angel instead of listening to the earnest importunities of Mrs. Diamond to keep where he was and continue to draw his salary. But the thought offered him only a hollow consolation. He preferred an earlier occasion, so that he might have time to analyze his emotions after the event.

The columns of the "Examiner" were more than usually crowded that week. Mr. Diamond had just yawned and nodded his way through the "Correspondence," and had arrived at the "Items of the Week." The change of ground seemed to give him an impetus, for he proceeded more briskly:

"We are authorized to state that Mr. Philip Lipcott-Duveen will contest the constituency of St. James'-in-the-East in the Radical interest at the ensuing General Election in place of Sir Saul Simmondson, who has definitely determined to retire from parliamentary life. We give a portrait and biographical sketch of Mr. Lipcott-Duveen in another column.

"The headmastership of the Tenter Street Infant Schools, vacant through the appointment of Mr. Lions to. . . ."

A shadow fell across the page, and, looking up, Mr. Diamond saw his wife lowering down on him, and

evidently making frantic attempts at catching her breath.

"Why, what's the matter, Becky, my dear, you aren't ill?" he asked, jumping up apprehensively.

"What's that you are jabbering about headmasters and infants and lions?" she jerked out.

Mr. Diamond gave a hurried glance at the paper, and then lifted his face to hers in mild reproach.

"But it says so here, Becky; I can't read you but what it says."

"And doesn't it say just before that little Philly Lipcott that I used to send errands is going to be a Member of Parliament, and you slur it over without even stopping to make a casual remark about it? Who are you that you shouldn't be surprised at errand-boys becoming Members of Parliament?"

"Does it really say he is going to?" asked Mr. Diamond in a small voice, diving back into the paper greatly abashed; for, as may be surmised, he had been reading with his eyes and not with his brain.

But Mrs. Diamond's patience had failed her, and snatching the journal from his hands, she intimated she would rather spell herself blind than rely any further on such a monster of untrustworthiness. Mr. Diamond accepted the rebuke in a proper spirit of dejection as indicated by a hanging head and down-cast eyes.

It took Mrs. Diamond quite ten minutes before she had worked her way through the short paragraph. Then gazing into the grate, she said:

"I'm still in two minds about it, Diamond—but I rather think I'm a bit annoyed with Mrs. Duveen. After all the friendliness I have shown her, fancy her

not dropping me a line on the private, and letting me find it out through the paper, just as if I was the ordinary sort of people. Well, I'm not the one to bear malice, and by way of telling her so, Diamond, you'll drop her a note as soon as the Sabbath is over, saying that you will do her the favor of going on the Election Committee for Phil, and that you stand good for a hundred votes . . . bless my heart and liver, the man's asleep!" she wound up as a sad, long-drawn snore from Mr. Diamond revealed to her the real intent of his contrite attitude. She tip-toed over to his chair, and shook him, though by no means roughly, by the shoulder.

"Help—help—he'll gore me," shrieked Mr. Diamond, who must have been dwelling in dreams on some episode of the abattoir.

His wife assured him that she was no runaway buffalo, and that he need not regard his little fright as too severe a punishment for putting her to the trouble of saying her say all over again.

"But where am I to get a hundred votes from?" enquired Mr. Diamond dolefully when he had heard her.

"Well, you've got one, and that leaves only another ninety-nine to be got besides—doesn't it?" replied Mrs. Diamond cheerfully.

The arithmetic of the thing was certainly correct, thought Mr. Diamond. But at the same time there rose to his agonized imagination the vision of himself, fifteen stone in his alpaca coat, toiling up unending staircases, with the heat of a London dog-day humming about his ears—only to be told that he "had better come again when the old man would be at home."

Mr. Diamond did not know who had invented elections; but had it been his own father, Mr. Diamond could not have refrained from the most unsparing censure of such misguided ingenuity. Being subject to all the more common impulses, Mr. Diamond did not take his misfortunes without a murmur. But, though in nine cases out of ten he could put his finger on their source by merely stretching out his arm, he preferred to trace them back to their most remote and aboriginal cause. It was safer.

Mrs. Diamond had meanwhile been making a critical study of Phil's portrait, and was just handing the paper back to her husband with the command to read the biographical sketch, when a loud rat-tat proceeded from the street door. The matter was unusual, because as a rule they had no visitors on Friday nights.

The little maid-of-all-work had hurried down to open, while Mrs. Diamond stood listening on the landing. A sudden hope had come fluttering about her heart. Perhaps Mrs. Duveen. . . . The next instant she bounced back into the room, with a snort of disgust.

"Only Julie Preager and Sadie Tannenbaum," she snapped.

She was still clutching the "Examiner," but as though to work off her disappointment somewhat, she viciously thrust it back into the inner pocket of Mr. Diamond's overcoat, which happened to be hanging on a nail near by.

The two visitors rushed in apparently laboring under strong excitement.

"Is it true. . . ." began Mrs. Tannenbaum.

"That Dinah Lipcott's second. . . ." Mrs. Preager snatched up the question.

"Is going to be made an M. P.?" screamed Mrs. Tannenbaum, determined that the lion's share of the query should be hers.

Mrs. Diamond regarded the two with a look of inefable caution.

"Who told you?" she asked finally.

"Why, everybody is talking about it," replied Mrs. Preager.

"So I says to Julie, 'Let's go and ask Becky—she'll know, if anybody,'" added Mrs. Tannenbaum with happy resourcefulness. She knew from bitter experience how to handle Mrs. Diamond.

The latter, however, seemed totally unimpressed by the broad tribute to her omniscience. She was shaking her head in wonder. "Strange how these things leak out," she said at last. "Well, since you know so much, my dears, I may as well tell you that it's quite true. I heard about it more than a month ago, only I had to give my word that I wouldn't breathe a syllable to anybody. By the way, Rose—that is, of course, Mrs. Duveen, God bless her—told me there would be a portrait and a biographical sketch of Phil in this week's 'Examiner'—I wonder if Diamond . . . dear me, I never saw such a glutton for sleep; there he's off again. I wonder, I was going to say, whether he brought the paper—oh, I can't bother to look, and it would be a shame to wake him."

"What's a geographical sketch, Becky?" enquired Mrs. Tannenbaum.

"His history, of course," Mrs. Preager took upon herself to reply.

"History, indeed," sniffed Mrs. Tannenbaum; "fat lot of history he's got to go to bed with. He may be

able to kid other people, but we know that he wasn't rocked in a golden cradle, don't we?"

"I should think I did," asserted Mrs. Diamond, speaking strictly on her own behalf; "I don't know if I ever told you how. . . ."

"How you wrote the letter to the Board of Guardians," exclaimed both Mrs. Preager and Mrs. Tannenbaum in a breath, horrified at the prospect of having the story once more inflicted upon their nauseated ears.

"Well, then, don't ask me if I know anything about Philly Lipcott," said Mrs. Diamond complacently.

"I can only say I pity Dinah if she puts on any airs when I meet her," remarked Mrs. Preager acidly. "I never like to brag, but I should have to remind her that a second cousin of mine once nearly got on to the vestry."

"And it wouldn't take me long to tell her that my son-in-law, Izzy, only last week made a shooting-jacket for a duke," threatened Mrs. Tannenbaum.

Mrs. Diamond smiled to herself disdainfully, knowing how infinitely her own claims to greatness exceeded those of her cronies. Still, a sudden access of magnanimity, which she herself could not explain, made her deliberate whether or not she should "put them to rights." The quick-witted Mrs. Tannenbaum, however, snatched at the merciful respite to change the current of the conversation.

"And what's Dinah's eldest been doing since he's back?"

"Goodness only knows," replied Mrs. Diamond; "he's something in the City, Dinah told me."

"Perhaps he keeps one of those orange-and-apple stalls near the Bank," hazarded Mrs. Preager.

"What nonsense you're talking," remonstrated Mrs. Diamond. "Don't you know that Dinah buys meat a shilling a pound, and changes her curtains once a fortnight?"

But Mrs. Preager was unabashed. "Well, I dare say he'll be found out one of these days—like the rest of 'em," she hinted darkly.

It is impossible to determine into how many shreds Leuw's reputation would eventually have been rent, had it not been for another and rather imperative knock at the street door. Mrs. Diamond jumped up eagerly; perhaps her fanciful anticipation was still to come true to-night. But, though she soon convinced herself that there was no Mrs. Duveen demanding admittance downstairs, the real arrivals were in their way just as surprising.

"Well, talk of the devil, my dears," she said under her breath, as she hurried back into the room, "it's Dinah and her eldest."

"You don't think he overheard me?" whispered Mrs. Preager flutteringly to Mrs. Tannenbaum.

"You stupid woman, how could he?" was the reassuring reply.

"No, I don't really suppose he could. But you remember we used to say that boy had eyes to see through a brick wall and ears to hear the flies slide across the ceiling."

It may be assumed that Mrs. Diamond's welcome was nothing less than overpowering. Her expression of unbounded delight mingled dexterously with pained but tender rebuke to Leuw at his having ignored her—her of all people—so long.

"I admit it was very wrong of me not to have called

on you before," smiled Leuw. "But I'm doing so as soon as I can possibly manage—ah, how do you do, Mr. Diamond? I'm sorry to have disturbed you. Why, you must have drunk of the elixir of youth."

"Excuse me, I wasn't . . ." began Mr. Diamond, blinking at him indignantly. "Oh, I understand what you mean—why, to be sure, aren't you my dear young friend, Leuw Lipcott?"

The ludicrous change in his manner made everybody laugh, and relieved the situation of a not unnatural stiffness. Only once, near the beginning, Mrs. Tannenbaum could not resist the temptation of reminding Mrs. Lipcott of her antecedents. However, she took good care to assure herself first that Leuw was closely absorbed in a conversation with Mr. Diamond.

"Talking of charwomen, Dinah, I must say I have never since come across such a worker as you used to be. I'll never forget the way you shined my parlor fender the day my Cissie got engaged. Do you happen to remember what kind of polish you used?"

"Now, how do you expect me to remember that, Sadie?" asked Mrs. Lipcott, looking at her frankly. "Still, if you want a tip how to keep your home bright, you might make a note that clean hands and a good temper will do that better than any sort of polish."

And now that the ground had been finally cleared, the talk spun on merrily. As it struck ten o'clock, Leuw cast an enquiring glance at his mother, which the latter answered with a shoulder shrug. A quarter of an hour later the two of them found themselves close to one another, and Leuw took the occasion to whisper something into her ear.

"It's no use waiting any longer," she whispered back; "they'll stay as long as we stay. But I don't see why you should take any notice of them; I'm sure Mrs. Diamond won't mind."

Leuw nodded and took something from his pocket.

"Mrs. Diamond," he said, seizing on a lull, "we are all friends here, so I needn't be shy of telling you the main reason of my visit to-night. It was to bring you a little present."

He held out to her a small square casket, which Mrs. Diamond took with the hesitation of extreme astonishment.

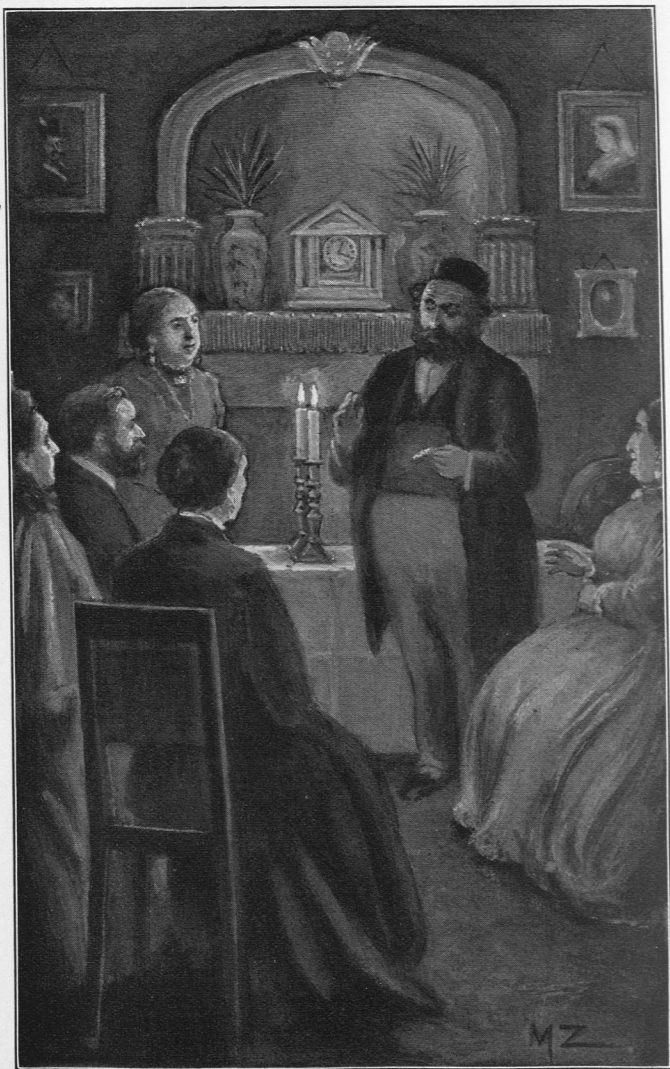
"A present? What for?"

"You may have forgotten, Mrs. Diamond, but I haven't," answered Leuw, his voice clear and resonant. "There was once a certain poor widow and two helpless orphans and a certain kind soul—but what's the use of my going on? We all know the story. It's only a little thing, Mrs. Diamond, and it took rather a long time in coming. But I hope it will show you I have not forgotten."

Mrs. Diamond stood speechless at this development of things, and in fumbling with the casket pressed the catch which held the lid. A fine five-stoned brooch sparkled into view.

"Oh!" came simultaneously from Mrs. Preager and Mrs. Tannenbaum.

Mrs. Diamond still said nothing, but stood looking at her husband. The latter came nearer, and examined the brooch critically. But his object in doing so was not to satisfy himself that the stones were genuine. It was only to gain time. If this silence continued but half a minute longer, the great opportunity of his life



THE GREAT OPPORTUNITY OF HIS LIFE.

would ripen into consummation. And so it happened. Mr. Diamond took a deep breath; he felt upon him the spirit which must have animated the prophets of old, so that they went forth to preach to the mobs of howling heretics, not knowing at what particular moment they would be torn limb from limb. The low ceiling had arched into a vast concave dome; at least so Mr. Diamond judged from the sound of his words as he said:

"Mr. Lipcott, my wife is very much obliged to you, but she will not accept your present."

Leuw hardly grasped the momentousness of the crisis, for he said cheerfully:

"Oh, if she doesn't care for it, she can change it for something else."

Mr. Diamond's face was very white, but his words came out red hot.

"It isn't the shape that my wife objects to, it's the whole idea of the thing. You said she was good to widows and orphans. That's only what anybody whom God has given a heart even the size of an olive would do; and it's not a matter that can be paid for at all on earth. I hope it's registered all right to her credit in heaven, and she's not going to get it scratched off for the sake of a bit of glitter to tickle her eyesight with."

"Spoken like a man, Mr. Diamond," said Leuw, his hand on the other's shoulder; "and now you'll let your wife take the brooch."

"Ask her yourself," replied Mr. Diamond, his heart in his mouth.

"It's no use, Mr. Lipcott. You must take my husband's answer."

Mr. Diamond gave a jump. It was years since she had spoken of him as her husband, at least in his hearing. So after all he seemed likely to redeem his manhood before he died.

Leuw scratched his ear in perplexity, half touched, half amused.

"Then what's to become of this unfortunate ornament?" he asked.

Both Mrs. Tannenbaum and Mrs. Preager crooked instinctive fingers.

"Let me have the money it cost, and I'll distribute it for the Passover," advised Mrs. Diamond, "but only on condition that you come here and see me do it."

"I'll come, if only for the pleasure of your society," smiled Leuw. "Mrs. Diamond, I have heard you say it yourself, but that does not detract from the truth of it: there are not too many like you. Mr. Diamond, you called me your friend; I shall try to deserve that title. Good night."

Leuw and Mrs. Lipcott's departure was followed almost immediately by that of Mrs. Preager and Mrs. Tannenbaum. The room was not large enough to hold their surprise.

"Eighty guineas, if a penny," said Mrs. Preager.

"And she refused it—because Diamond told her to," added Mrs. Tannenbaum.

"Because Diamond told her! Diamond answered, when *she* was spoken to!"

"Julie, take my word for it, the world's coming to an end!" summed up Mrs. Tannenbaum.

The first thing Mrs. Diamond became aware of, as soon as the visitors had left, was that she had added a new sensation to her life: for the first time since she

was married she felt embarrassed in the presence of her husband. And what was more, she did not try to disguise the fact from herself. Mr. Diamond's state of mind was also contrary to all precedent. The flush and exhilaration of his great exploit had died away; he had returned to his workaday mood, and still he had not been overtaken by the symptoms which should have supervened in the usual course of events. But for all that he furtively hoped that Mrs. Diamond would take a sensible view of the incident.

When, however, he did hear her comment upon it, he glanced involuntarily at the couch to make sure there was no Lazarus Diamond taking his nap there.

"Diamond, you know you came near to being the death of me before?" began Mrs. Diamond.

"God forbid, Becky; how did I manage that?"

"By nearly making me explode with pride. I didn't believe my ears. 'Is that Diamond talking up like that?' I says to myself. You couldn't have done it grander if you had had the whole world to listen to you. Gracious, to see Julie and Sadie stare—it was worth a whole Regent Street jewelry shop."

"I wasn't thinking of making them stare, Becky, my dear," said Mr. Diamond quietly, "and I wasn't riding the high horse and parading myself. I talked just the way I was minded; and, thank God"—he wiped his forehead at the retrospect—"you were minded the same."

"Diamond, I'm certain I should have given in even if I hadn't been. I was too proud of you for anything else."

There was a pregnant interval, after which Mrs. Diamond resumed.

"You know what? Now that I come to think of it, there must be a lot of good points about you I haven't appreciated."

"How could I expect you to—a busy woman like you?" Mr. Diamond said to allay her pangs of conscience.

"And perhaps my temper was a trifle shorter and my tongue a trifle longer than might have been."

"Well, then, I can't complain; at least you let me have the long and the short of it."

"But from to-day it'll be different, I promise you."

"Why different, Becky? You're quite good enough for me as you are."

"Don't, or you'll make me hug you. But oh, Diamond. . . ."

"Yes, Becky, my dear?"

"If I could have worn that brooch just for five minutes before I gave it back!"

CHAPTER XXIX

It was some days later. Mr. Alexander was making his way to the Underground Railway Station to take train for St. John's Wood. He seemed in no hurry to get there. In fact, he had already missed his usual train and the one after. It was a full hour past the regulation closing time for City offices, but the streets had not yet assumed the aspect of cloistral desolation they wore on other evenings. Nevertheless, the crowds that thronged them showed uncannily lifeless—phantomlike almost; they hurried along in quick automatic jerks, their footfalls leaving no echo, their movements a concert of dull, constrained silence, through which the chorus of bawling newsboys rang with more than its customarily distressing shrillness. At every turn one was startled by the faces of men and women tense with ill-concealed anxiety or lax in a frank abandonment to wretchedness. Over all there hung an atmosphere of wreckage and catastrophe.

"How can I tell her—how can I tell her?" muttered Mr. Alexander to himself for the tenth time.

And just then a thought struck him which caused him to make a spasmodic grab at the door handle of the compartment in which he was sitting, as though he intended to jump out and outdistance the train by running.

"Good God, while I have been loitering about in my cowardice, some one may have taken the news to her already."

He had indeed a difficult task before him, as bearers of unwelcome tidings always must have; but though he had delayed it as long as possible, he had not for a moment meant to shirk it. If he could not deaden the shock utterly, he might at least do some good by catching the rebound of it on his own heart. For the remainder of the journey he consoled himself vaguely with the recollection of the telegram he had sent Phil:

"Don't fail to come up this evening. You may be wanted."

A glance at his sister, as he entered the sitting-room, told Mr. Alexander, greatly to his relief, that she knew nothing.

"You seem to have had a hard day, Bram," said Mrs. Duveen affectionately passing her hand over the furrows on his forehead.

"Not that so much. I feel a little worried."

"What, the markets bad?"

"No, there have been some disquieting rumors about, concerning the City and Southminster Bank."

"My Bank, Bram?" asked Mrs. Duveen, her voice rather unsteady. "But didn't you at once go round to Mr. Barker to enquire?" she added.

"I did. Rose, be a brave little woman. The Bank has failed."

"And I am penniless."

"Not absolutely, dear. Barker says the liquidation will leave at least three shillings in the pound. That will still. . . ."

"Oh, my poor child—my poor little Dulcie," moaned Mrs. Duveen.

"Rose, don't be unreasonable. The thing is a blow, .

I admit, but you must not forget that I am your brother, and. . . ."

"Don't scold me, Bram," was her reply. "Just let me say or do whatever I like for the moment. I shall have plenty of time to be ashamed of it afterwards."

And taking his consent for granted, she broke into a fit of weeping that shook her from head to foot. Mr. Alexander stepped back, and looked on helplessly, dividing his apprehensive gaze between his sister and the door. His apprehension was justified, for presently Dulcie entered, and took in the scene in agonized bewilderment.

"Dulcie, we have lost all our money; the Bank has failed," cried Mrs. Duveen, in answer to the girl's mutely frantic attempts to soothe her back into self-composure.

Dulcie rose to her feet with a bound, and, her hand tightly pressed to her fluttering heart, drew a piteous breath of relief.

"Is that all?" she asked, looking at Uncle Bram for corroboration. "I thought that perhaps somebody was dead."

"Yes, that's all," echoed Uncle Bram, heroically calm. "I told her it was nothing to make a fuss about."

"Make a fuss about?" cried Dulcie, back on her knees at her mother's side. "I shouldn't think it was. Why, mother, it's splendid. We'll take a three-roomed cottage in the country, and I'll go and fetch the milk in the morning, fresh from the cow, and do the housekeeping and cooking. . . ."

"And make yourself foolish generally," growled Uncle Bram viciously. "Rose, Dulcie, understand

one thing. There's going to be no nonsense here. Cottage, cows, cooking—ridiculous! If it were not that I wanted to save you the trouble of making out cheques on a non-existent Bank, you wouldn't have known anything at all about this, as far as I could have helped it. You both know as well as I what I was going to do with my money. Don't let us have any absurd expostulations about it. I don't suppose you would have scrupled to take it, if left to you in due course by my last will and testament. If you raise any objections now, I shall have no alternative but to beat them down by threatening to remove myself from the face of this earth forcibly and unnaturally in the flush of my youth and beauty."

"Hush, Bram," breathed Mrs. Duveen, her handkerchief still to her eyes, and her hand groping blindly for that of her brother.

"Then we shall consider it settled," said the latter, seizing it warmly. "It's no use making a secret of your loss, Rose. Everybody will know how the failure has affected you financially. But otherwise you need not answer impertinent questions, and I dare say you are strong enough to let people think what they like."

"Do you suppose I should have the slightest hesitation in letting them know who has come to our rescue—even if they did not guess?" asked Mrs. Duveen, regarding him reproachfully.

"Only you might have waited a little before rescuing us," added Dulcie, with the pretense of a pout.

"There was absolutely no reason why I should," smiled Uncle Bram.

"Yes, there was. Here we have been rich and poor

and rich again, all in the same breath. You ought to have given us a chance of getting the full benefit out of our reverse."

"Benefit?" repeated Uncle Bram, astonished.

"I mean, get the whole moral of it, grow humble and introspective and chastened in spirit, as is becoming under the circumstances. You might, at least, have given us time to look interesting as people who had 'seen better days, you know'—oh, what a horrid thing I am to make you reproaches, even in fun!"

And for further earnest of her repentance, her arms were round his neck and her face on the lapel of his coat. Mr. Alexander, patting her cheek, felt a hot trickle pass over his hand. That warned him not to pursue the subject. So he suddenly became very matter-of-fact, and launched forth on a brisk account of the causes, which, as far as he had ascertained, had led to the failure of the City and Southminster.

But though he addressed himself impartially both to mother and daughter, he had in reality only one listener. Mrs. Duveen's thoughts were elsewhere; they were with Phil. She was harping on the promise she had made him. Immediately after the momentary unreasoning alarm for the future of her child had come the realization of the predicament in which the unforeseen course of events had placed her. Dulcie was secured, but Phil was counting on the support of a broken reed. She, who had been an almoner in her own right, had become a pensioner herself. She had made no resistance to accepting help, because she knew the spirit in which she had done her own dispensing; and she also knew as intimately that her kinship with her only brother was something more

than mere affinity of blood. And so she was convinced that he regarded this opportunity of being good to those he loved as a favor to himself; had she not felt the same? She was equally certain that he would save her the ignominy of not being able to meet her self-imposed obligations. That practically disposed of the difficulty with Phil. Still, it complicated things unnecessarily, if not very formidably. Besides, there was Phil himself to be reckoned with. But she had faith in Phil; he could be easily made to see things in their proper light. It was only fair to him, however; that she should assure herself of his decision before she put the case to her brother. She looked forward to it with some impatience, but with no great disquietude.

Phil arrived just as Mr. Alexander was bringing his story to a close. He looked anxious and perturbed.

"Bread and cheese for dinner to-day—we must economize," Dulcie greeted him merrily.

Phil nodded, but evidently without entering into the spirit of the jest. "I just saw it in the paper," he said gravely. "Is it really so serious?"

"I am afraid it is—for some of the other depositors," answered Mr. Alexander. "Then apparently you didn't get my wire."

"No, I haven't been at my rooms since lunch."

"I wired to Phil to come up," explained Mr. Alexander genially, eager to prevent a recurrence of the emotional stage of the proceedings. "I can't keep it on my conscience. I wanted him to help me in the task of administering consolation—a horrible outrage on your common sense, for which my humblest apologies. I ought to have known how beautifully you

two women would take it. Not much trace of a cataclysm here, eh, Phil?"

"For the other depositors, you said," reverted Phil. "Then am I to understand that the breakdown has not affected Aunt very greatly?"

"Not in the least," replied Mr. Alexander hastily.

"I am very thankful, indeed," said Phil, looking his relief.

"Quite so," commented Mr. Alexander indefinitely. "And now please we'll quit this miserable business; we have honored it quite enough with our attention. When do you begin your campaign, Phil?"

"To-morrow evening Sir Saul will introduce me formally to the Association," replied Phil rather reluctantly. Mr. Alexander's evident desire to get away from the "miserable business" looked to him very suspicious, and renewed his previous apprehensions. He also felt a little hurt. Perhaps Mr. Alexander might have vouchsafed to him some explanation how Mrs. Duveen had succeeded in escaping the disaster which, from all accounts, had overwhelmed everybody else. However, he kept his thoughts well under control, and took his share in the conversation with as good a grace as possible, waiting his opportunity.

That came when Mrs. Duveen rose, ostensibly to pay a visit to the kitchen. There was no need of her significant manner to tell Phil that the movement was a feint. Laughingly offering his help he hurried after her.

The laugh stopped abruptly on the other side of the door.

"What is the truth about this, Aunt?" he asked almost harshly.

"Come in here," she said, drawing him quickly into the little chamber that served as her sanctum.

Phil entered, and waited for her to speak.

"You guessed rightly," she began, her voice full of deprecation; "Bram has not told you the real state of things. My fortune is gone. Bram talks of three shillings in the pound, but I don't believe him. Something altogether irretrievable must have happened to compel an important concern like the City and Southminster to declare bankrupt. For my own part and Dulcie's, the difference it makes in our position is very slight, thanks to Bram. But you know where the inconvenience of it comes in."

Phil nodded, without, however, looking at her.

Mrs. Duveen went on more warmly; "You must also know that the inconvenience exists only on the surface. I only want your permission to act, and it is removed altogether."

"You mean through Uncle Bram?"

"Yes; I am glad you don't 'shy' at the idea. Of course, at first glance it may seem a second-hand way of doing things, but that is a matter which ought to trouble me instead of you. If I have no compunction about it, you certainly ought to have none. Tell me, when shall I ask him? To-night?"

"No, no, not to-night," replied Phil with impulsive haste. "I must think it over thoroughly by myself first. Perhaps I may find my own way of circumventing the difficulty."

Mrs. Duveen looked disappointed. "At any rate, give me your assurance that you will make Bram your first fall-back—as my substitute."

"I will, I will," promised Phil, but with so patent

an air of abstraction that Mrs. Duveen might well doubt whether he had grasped the full purport of her request.

"Does Eff—I mean do the Elkins know?" he asked suddenly.

"Not so far as I am aware."

"Shall I go and tell them?"

"There is no particular reason why you should. But perhaps you still require a pretext—the week isn't up yet," smiled Mrs. Duveen; "and if she can get away, bring Effie back with you."

But Phil had only set foot in the street, when he came upon Effie hurrying towards the house.

"I know, I know," she forestalled him breathlessly. "Somebody came in and casually mentioned that the Bank had failed; and mother, guessing what it meant to Aunt Rose, sent me round to do what I could to cheer them up. She won't be able to go out herself for another day or two. Are they dreadfully upset, and does it hit them very hard?"

Phil briefly told her as much as he knew of the situation, and then they sought admission.

Mr. Alexander had certainly good cause to be gratified at the light-heartedness by which both Mrs. Duveen and Dulcie testified how thoroughly he had set their minds at rest. He had scarcely hoped for so great and so immediate a reward. It would have needed indeed a sharp eye to have detected from evidence furnished by this merry company that the shadow of a great disaster had come and gone that very day. Effie, having scribbled a re-assuring note and despatched it through Mrs. Duveen's maid, required no pressure to be induced to stay, especially as

she knew her mother well provided as to company for the evening. The one exception was Phil, and that only at the beginning. Having betrayed a wool-gathering mood by frequent "I-beg-your-pardons" on being addressed, and having got soundly rated for the same, he eventually pulled himself together to escape further comment.

So it was past ten when Effie left, escorted by Phil.

"I haven't thanked you for your note of this afternoon," she said eagerly as soon as they were outside. "It's awfully good of Sir Saul to take on himself the trouble of presenting you to the Committee; he must think a lot of you. I have been glad all day at the thought that at last you are beginning work in earnest. The idea of it grows on me hour by hour. Phil, the more I reflect on it, the more certain I become that you have a great political career before you."

"It is very kind of you to say so," he murmured.

But such as they were, the words cost him an effort she did not dream of. And yet he felt a strong impulse to go on speaking and tell her—what? Had he something to tell her? Had he already made sure of himself? Even if he had, he must make still surer. That he could only do by looking deep, deep down in his heart, but alone, with nobody near him. Besides, it was already so late to-night—there was really no hurry. . . . And while he was thus haggling with himself for grace, the opportunity had passed, for presently she resumed, and with a voice that had changed from seriousness to archness:

"Phil, dear, I could tell you something that would interest you very much," she was saying.

"Everything you tell me. . . ."

"But I don't think I ought to," she interrupted the coming compliment.

"Don't do violence to yourself," he said indulgently.

"You great, big silly, don't you see I want to be worried into telling?"

He humored her instantly.

"Well, it's something about Dulcie," she resumed with affected reluctance, to keep up the appearance of compulsion. "The loss of her mother's money doesn't seem to have left any bad results on her; I hope her loss of something else won't leave any either."

"The loss of what?"

"Oh, dear, there's denseness for you. Of her heart, of course."

Phil halted in surprise. "Really? I had no notion of it."

"What, not even a notion? Oh, Phil, you are aggravating."

"Forgive me, dearest, I did not have the inclination to notice anything but you."

The loving pressure of her arm on his assured him of her contrition and gratitude.

"Who is he? Do I know him? He must be a paragon among men to deserve her," he went on, his voice rising at the last words.

"You could tell that best—that is, if you are not unduly prejudiced in his favor."

The meaning of her allusion was unmistakable. It startled and held him tongue-tied.

"Phil, dear," she pleaded, "you don't consider I have been blabbing? Because I haven't. Seeing that you are I, and I am you, and we are both each other,

or ought to be—it would have been wrong if I had kept it from you.”

“Distinctly wrong,” he comforted her smilingly. “Only I want to know—did you tell me for any purpose?”

“God forbid,” she ejaculated, horrified. “You don’t suspect Dulcie has given me a brief for her?”

“This time it ought to be my turn to scold,” he said gently, as they came to a halt outside Effie’s home, “but I generously refrain from keeping you out in the cold here. I will only say this about Dulcie and Leuw: if it is to be, they will find each other, as we have.”

“Phil, that sounds frightfully fatalistic,” she jested.

“Remember we hail from the Orient, the home of Kismet,” he explained.

She laughed merrily, but his own face remained strangely staid.

“As we have,” she harked back softly. “And to-morrow we are going to tell the whole world about it.”

“To-morrow,” he echoed. “I shall come to remind you, in case you forget.”

“It may be necessary. I had nearly forgotten the world—through you.”

He thrilled. Such a “good-night” was worth living for. And then he went home to think.

CHAPTER XXX

THAT Phil was true to his intention, and did a considerable amount of hard thinking that night was manifest the next morning from the dark circles under his eyes and a general appearance of drawn haggardness. But despite these visible vestiges of inward storm and stress, his face wore a confident serenity, which showed that the back of the conflict was broken, and that he had issued victorious. And, indeed, he felt a wonderful sense of security as he thought of what lay behind him. That day contained for him one great uncertainty; but, whichever way its balance might incline, the night had been an indubitable, inalienable achievement, in which he would find—if he had need for it—a partial compensation.

He rose early, because the morning's program was a full one. It comprised four calls, each of them momentous, and he was desirous of getting them over, because he knew that, till he had done so, his life would be a dangerous and demoralizing seesaw of emotion. Emotion, at the best, was but a luxury of the soul; he was certainly paying too heavily for his by a prolonged drain on his mind and body.

In accordance with this mood of practical economy, he gave priority to the visit which, among those on his list, could lay claim to the most business-like nature. It took him to Sir Saul Simmondson. The interview between the two men did not last long, but, short as it was, it effected its purpose decisively. It

was also encouraging. As Phil left the baronet, he called himself a fool for having anticipated difficulties and for not approaching the matter in hand with a more equable state of mind. Sir Saul had received the information Phil had brought him sympathetically, and had indeed seemed a little surprised at the agitation his visitor had displayed. Phil told himself that he ought to take advantage of the moral of the circumstance and to act accordingly.

But for all that, his heart beat considerably faster as Mrs. Elkin's house hove in sight. Still, he had a ready excuse for that; it would have been much more strange if his blood had not coursed quicker at the immediate prospect of seeing Effie. It did not even strike him as curious that, although quite fifteen hours—waking hours, most of them—had passed since he had last set eyes on her, he should now feel hardly conscious of the interval, instead of deeming it a petty eternity. It only proved to him how deeply she had entered into his being, how inseparable her entity had become from his, that time and space perished before this all-pervasiveness of hers. "You are I, and I am you." Yes, she was right. Perhaps he had only just now stumbled on the real truth why he had so long delayed asking her formally to identify her life with his.

She opened the door for him herself, and the dull, murky morning seemed suddenly to become flooded with light and fragrance.

"I have been studying your knock—wasn't it good of me?"

Then her tone veered round to dismay. "Oh, dear, from where did you get that gray face?"

"I—I slept badly," he stammered, following her into the room.

"I thought you had perhaps bad news for me—for instance, that you repented your contract," she laughed with shamefaced joyousness.

"I have news for you," he replied tremulously; "but whether it is good or bad, depends entirely on your point of view."

"I like that sort of news," was her comment; "it makes you feel as if you were the arbiter of your own destiny. Quick, let me hear."

"My candidature for the St. James' Division is canceled," he said.

Her face fell. "No, that is not good news," she said slowly. "Have they superseded you by another man?"

"No."

"Perhaps you are going to stand for another constituency instead," she hazarded eagerly.

"Neither."

A puzzled look came over her. "Then I don't understand it, Phil."

"I have withdrawn of my own accord."

"Of your own accord?" she repeated. "Nonsense, you are jesting."

"No, dear, it is true. I have just come from Sir Saul. I went to inform him that the Committee must look out for another candidate."

She seemed to hold her breath as she asked: "What made you do that?"

Phil did not answer immediately; he was annoyed with himself. He knew she would ask the question, and he had been so improvident as not to have mar-

shaled his case properly beforehand. And so he came out, floundering and at random almost, with the explanation how the financial disaster which had overtaken Mrs. Duveen had affected him also, inasmuch as it had made void her promise as to the supply of means necessary for launching him on his career.

Effie listened intently, and then laughed in the fullness of her relief.

"Is that all?" she asked. "Only a matter of money? You foolish boy, beating about the bush like that. Surely you must have known you had only to speak out, and I. . . ."

He interrupted her with a quick gesture. "No, dear," he said gently; "I thank you sincerely, but you cannot help me."

She came close to him, and stroked his hand with smiling indulgence.

"Of course, Phil, dear, you have to say so," she answered, her voice as caressing as her hand. "You men have such funny notions of pride. The way you are arguing in this case I suppose is that if Aunt Rose had advanced you this money, you could have salved your self-esteem by returning it. But you won't take it from me, because there can be no talk of borrowing or lending between"—she blushed gloriously—"between husband and wife. And so you prefer to get yourself into an *impasse*. You forget that—but there, Phil, you don't want me to show you up in all your absurdity?"

"I admit your logic," smiled Phil tenderly. "But there are other reasons, which. . . ."

She withdrew her hand, not too gently. "Whatever they may be, I don't think you ought to let them

count when you hear me begging to be allowed to smooth the way for you."

"If you would only hear them," he entreated humbly.

"I will not hear them. You should not even have asked me to. You know my wishes, and they, in my opinion, should be at least as potent as your reasons. I am not demanding more than any woman would think herself entitled to. Phil, dear, give way to me."

He shook his head, despairing, but firm. "I can't, Effie—I can't. If you will only give me two moments to explain. . . ."

She stepped away from him, tears of anger and indignation in her eyes.

"Do you know what you have done?" she exclaimed. "You have obtained my word under false pretenses. And that being so, you can hardly expect me to consider it binding."

"Oh, God, Effie, you won't go as far as that?" was his cry of alarm.

"I should go further if I could," she replied relentlessly. "You have deserved nothing better. You came to me with a certain thing, as though it were necessary to offer me a bait, a bribe, and when you had got me to merge my ambition in yours, because I was unselfish enough to bask in your light rather than shine in my own, you come again and calmly propose to throw it all overboard—for other reasons."

Her scorn seared him till he winced, but she vainly waited for him to speak.

"Very good, then," she went on icily; "it appears you fall in with my suggestion. I am glad you do it so readily. Nothing has been lost through—through

the false position in which we have been placed during the past few days. Nobody will or need know—my condition of a week's silence must have been an inspiration; it may also console you to learn that my agreement with the agent still holds good—I had simply forgotten to acquaint him with the change in my intentions. I am sure you will wish me success; at any rate you would have done so a week ago, and there is nothing to prevent us from taking up the thread of our relations where we left them then."

"You had led me to believe that you loved me for myself," he said, with wide gaps between his words.

"And I should never have made you think otherwise," she replied.

"No, because you have done so already," he cried vehemently.

She turned on him a dispassionate look of enquiry.

"You have done so already," he reiterated, trying to keep up his vehemence, but failing utterly. "I was dear to you only in so far as I was to you the embodiment of our joint ambitions. And now that I have frankly told you that I cannot bring them to issue in a certain province of which you approve, I have become valueless in your eyes. What else am I to think?"

"If you can't give me a little more chivalry, you might at least give me better reasoning," she said with quiet dignity. "Tell me, of whose making is this breach? You want me to believe that my love is to you the dearest thing in the world, and yet, the very first occasion on which I put it to the test, you show me clearly that it has no power beside your pride or obstinacy. . . ."

"Or something else," he interrupted bitterly. "You see, you might have known, but you preferred to gag me into silence. Well, it doesn't matter. After all, if you did not credit me with being sufficiently sane as not to have come to my resolution without rational and legitimate cause, I could hardly hope to convince you of the same by the most minute and elaborate of explanations."

Her face softened, and she came a little nearer.

"Your complaint is just, and I was wrong," she said. "Come, Phil, I have made a concession—do as much. Look, I shall make it still easier for you. I will not ask it as a right, but as a privilege."

"Then you insist on my. . . ."

"Insist? No, haven't I just told you? I entreat—I implore."

She could read the heart-break and misery in his face, but his gesture of refusal was equally unmistakable. She moved away again.

"Very good," she clinched the argument, continuing almost playfully: "No, please, don't look so sad. This is really a matter for mutual congratulation. We have come to a timely understanding. Not everybody is so lucky."

He stood still, turned to go, and then faced her again helplessly. His lips moved for a second or two before they shaped sound.

"You—you will let me wish you success before I go?"

"Oh, on my musical career?"

"I may be of some use to you," he went on impotently, for he knew it was not what he really wanted to say, and yet he could not help it, he felt so barren

of thought. "Yes, I may be useful to you. I have several influential critics among my acquaintances. One can't get too much encouragement to begin with."

"Thank you, thank you," she said quickly; "it's very good of you to think of it. And it's still better of you to show your readiness to fall in with my suggestion of before, and take up the thread where we left it a week ago."

Despite the bluntness which had fallen upon his senses, Phil could not help noting the curious intonations of her last sentence. Plainly she invited him to controvert, repudiate, protest against the consequence implied in her own offer—held out to him a strong handle for overture, even compromise. He did not know whether to derive balm or an increase of agony from this indication that she, too, could not bear the wrench without flinching. But instead of adding to his confusion, it only warned him that he must redouble his hold on himself. And as he could not possibly do that without straining himself dead, he had but one alternative—flight. With a spasmodic handshake, to which she responded mechanically, and a murmured "good-by," to which she made no answer at all, he walked from the room. Outside at the gate he glanced back, and saw her at the window, her gaze following him smilingly. He turned away quickly and hurried on. He had had a narrow escape; had he looked an instant longer. . . .

A minute or two later he was making his third call. Mrs. Duveen, the maid told him, had gone out an hour ago with Miss Dulcie, and had not left word when they would be back. Phil presumed they had

run down to the City, in order to hear further particulars of the bank smash at first hand. He knew they would hear nothing to gratify them, for the morning paper he had glanced at in the train had stated that the worst apprehensions concerning the calamity were more than justified. Phil had no patience to wait, and yet he felt unwilling to leave without having effected his purpose. Till he had disposed of this thing completely, he dared not consider himself a free man. So he surmounted the difficulty by stepping into the library and penning a note to Mrs. Duveen.

He did not begin immediately, for he had to wait till the blur had passed away from before his sight, and his hand had regained its requisite steadiness. He had become conscious all at once that here he had reached the sanctuary of privacy, having escaped the hounding glare of the inquisitive streets; and he need have no shame before himself. But he refrained. Sudden extremes were dangerous, and the fall from the heights of heroism—the word was no exaggeration—to the depths of abject weakness, would mean a disarrangement of nerve and mental fibre not easily reparable. So he forced his thoughts into working trim, and started his letter by informing Mrs. Duveen how he proposed to extricate her from the quandary in which she had hinted she had been placed by her inability to come up to her undertaking.

"I have informed Sir Saul," he went on; "I told him that, at the very outset of my professional career, I could not afford to trifle with my chances of success by dividing my energies between building up a practice and attending to my parliamentary responsibilities—that, at any rate, the latter might inadvertently

suffer, and I dared not run the risk of failing in my duty to the constituency. He accepted my explanation as valid. To you, however, I must allow a deeper insight into the machinery of my motives. That you will be surprised, I fully anticipate; I was myself somewhat, to tell the truth. If you remember I pledged myself to make use, financially, of no help but yours in setting out on my political career, yours or none at all. At the time I gave you the assurance I had as little presentiment as you of the contrariness ahead. But it was the first thought that struck my mind, with veritable sledge-hammer force, when I heard the news yesterday. From the first moment I saw in it something more than an annoying *contretemps*—I saw in it the finger of Providence outstretched visibly, and indicating to me that the path on which I was about to enter was not my destined walk of life. It also turned my gaze back to things I had left at my rear—but on that I feel no call to expatiate in this note. What will appear to you strange, as it did to me, is that I should bend the knee to this almost primitive sort of fatalism. But I have satisfied myself on the point, and feel confident I shall satisfy you when you hear me.”

He paused a little and bit his pen. The word “fatalism” reminded him of Effie’s jesting allusion to it the night before. He had explained it away by an ethnological commonplace. But it startled him even now to think how close to the truth she had come. For the nonce he had considered it, not as the natural inference to be drawn from his remark, but as a phenomenal instance of intuition, second sight almost. Why had she not exercised that power to-day? Why had she not interpreted him more truly herself, since

she had refused him permission to be his own interpreter? Why. . . . But he pulled himself up short; once he commenced to ask questions, he might not know where to stop. He might end by concurring with the people who said that all life was a riddle, incapable of solution. He had always refused to believe it. Nothing could be more pernicious, more paralyzing than this doctrine of the vanity of human endeavor. Action was but the spirit of enquiry materialized; and he did not want to be brought to a halt before the dead wall of blank impossibility. He had many things to do—and he would do them.

He brought his letter to a close, practically adding nothing save the assurance that this decision of his was final, and a request that she should accept it as such. He put the note into an envelope, and handed it to the maid to deliver to Mrs. Duveen immediately on her return. Then he sallied out once more to pay his fourth and last call that morning. He anticipated it eagerly; for this time his was a more grateful errand. He went not to take away, to dispossess, but to restore, to make amends. He could look forward to sympathy, to open arms. And how sorely he needed them! His whole being was nothing but a bruise, a weariness, an aching rebound.

He found Leuw in his outer office.

"Have you five minutes for me?" Phil asked him.

"Certainly," replied Leuw, taking him by the arm and stepping with him into his private room.

"This is a sad business, isn't it?" he said, closing the door behind them.

"What is?" asked Phil quickly.

"The City and Southminster. I met Mr. Alexander

this morning, and he stopped to ask whether I was at all involved. I was glad to be able to say I was not. He and I are apparently the only two people who can say that. And then he told me about poor Mrs. Duveen."

Phil made no comment, but stood, with his back to Leuw, staring moodily into the grate. Leuw watched him thus for a little time; then with a quiet smile he pulled out his cheque book, and put his signature to one of the blank forms.

"Do you mind coming here a moment, Phil?" he called.

Phil obeyed, slowly stepping up to the writing-desk.

"Oblige me by filling that in," continued Leuw, holding out to him his pen; "but please don't make it more than seven figures," he cautioned him with a laugh.

"What is this for?" asked Phil, staring at the paper slip.

"For anything you require. We need not go into details."

Phil looked at him keenly, and then pushed the cheque back to him.

"Thank you, very much, but I really have no use for it."

"Nonsense, Phil; you must have. You told me you have, at present, no fixed income. And now that you have no longer Mrs. Duveen to rely on—remember your election is approaching."

Phil shook his head. It struck him if every sinner were to have so many stumbling-blocks placed in the path of his repentance, the occasions for joy in heaven would be few and far between.

"Leuw," he said at last resolutely, "there will be no election—for me. I have withdrawn." And then, without giving his brother time to voice his astonishment, he proceeded: "I know I have done everything I could do to forfeit your confidence. But if you will give me a chance of retrieving myself, I promise you will not again be disappointed. Take me back, Leuw; let us work together at the task that was to be ours."

"The Scheme, you mean?" exclaimed Leuw, starting up.

"The Scheme," repeated Phil solemnly. "Leuw, I feel like a man who has awakened from a trance, in which he has been doing the will of another—and has done ill things. I have treated you very badly, Leuw, so badly that you might well look on my very apology as an insult."

"But I had no notion of this—the change is so sudden," said Leuw bewildered.

"It had to be sudden or not at all," replied Phil. "Perhaps my conscience would, sooner or later, have got tickled into life; but that is problematic. What it wanted was a downright upheaval, to shake it to its very foundations. And, thank God, it has had it."

And with bated breath he told Leuw, using almost the same words as in his note to Mrs. Duveen, what it was that had influenced him so powerfully.

"I don't suppose I shall be able to convince one man out of a hundred that this does not smack of rank superstition," he went on with a short laugh; "but what does it matter that the medicine was not according to prescription, so long as the patient is cured? Oh, what an inconsistent fool I have been! I railed in all the bitterness of my heart against those of us

whose self-interest counseled them to seek the wider scope and the more glittering rewards of the outer world, instead of following the secret call they must all have felt at one time or another to set in order the things that were awry in the community. I was angry with them because they did not perceive and snatch at the opportunity of doing their duty to their country—by doing their duty to their brethren. And now I have become myself my most flagrant instance in point. Leuw, do you think I can ever again set any store on my judgment of right and wrong?"

Leuw's face had taken to itself a troubled look, but he spoke soothingly.

"You are too severe on yourself, Phil. Listen to me. You know I welcome you back with all my heart and soul. If, half an hour ago, anybody had asked me for my dearest wish—at least, one of them"—his voice fell at the last words—"it would have been your return to the camp. But what you have just said opens to me another aspect of the question. It is true, as you say, that the great majority of us would best serve our fellow-citizens by serving our fellow-Jews. Still, there are, no doubt, some few of us, of whom our country can make use in a more direct fashion, especially in the vocation which has been offered to you. Remember our race has already given England one man to whom she owes at least something of her greatness."

"And you think I may turn out to be another?" broke in Phil, with an incredulous smile.

"Who knows?" returned Leuw soberly. "You certainly have given proof that you may aspire to anything."

"No, Leuw, not so high as all that," said Phil. "To begin with, it is against the chances of probability. Our having had a Beaconsfield as recently as a generation ago is almost conclusive that there will not be a second for a very long time yet, if at all. History repeats itself in events—rarely in individuals. For another thing, Leuw, it would be against the spirit of the race. Our race is prodigal in towering talent, but it is chary in real master minds. We are in the habit of accounting for that by pointing to the hostile circumstances which have, for so many centuries, cramped and hampered our development. But I think the true cause is something more radical, more fundamental. It is an astonishing manifestation of the wise economy wherewith the race of the Covenant husbands its vitality. Instead of exhausting its resources in the production of genius, it prefers to consummate itself more frugally in brilliant mediocrity. It could only be by the exercise of millennial effort that nature created a fixed star; her meteors and nebulae are but the pastime of her idle moments. The spirit of the race, feeling that, unlike Nature's, its energies were finite, could not afford to indulge in the luxury of fixed stars; it remembered that there was an interminable line of posterity to provide for, and that the penalty of over-exertion was ultimate degeneracy and effeteness."

He paused and looked at Leuw, who smiled back at him as he said:

"Your theory is attractive, like all things that appeal to the fancy rather than to the understanding."

"Fancy is instinct, and understanding is second thought; the former is more often correct than the latter," replied Phil dogmatically. "But, however that

may be, it will not prevent me from following my theory into its most important side issue. We have never appreciated how beneficially this economy of capacity has reacted on our conditions of life through every period since our dispersion. We might almost call it our good angel. What if we had possessed more fixed stars—more geniuses? We should have added fuel to the blaze of odium which was scorching us. Had more of our heads touched the clouds, we should only have elicited the lightning more frequently. Our greatest danger, perhaps, has been our pre-eminence; we have been constantly too much in the world's forefront. It has brought us a grudged and doled-out glory, but it has brought us no happiness. Let us lay the moral of it to heart and that in its widest application. Let us see what a change of policy will do for us. Suppose we cultivate a habit of self-effacement. Not the self-effacement implied in an absorption into our surroundings—our case is not so desperate that we must resort to racial suicide; neither that, nor a skulking obscurity, which might be construed into a shirking of the duties that must come to us in the natural order of things. But there surely must be much virtue in a dignified, self-contained, self-contented aloofness. We may find it difficult to accustom ourselves to it, but what should help us is our belief that we are yet to be the protagonists on the spiritual stage of the world; and meantime let us quietly make ourselves word- and heart-perfect in our parts."

Leuw listened eagerly; where had he heard this before? Ah, he recollected. He had had the gist of it from Yellow Joe the other evening. His nerves

tingled. So the thoughts of the broken-down drudge and the finished man of culture ran in one and the same channel. They were, indeed, brothers, the people of the Covenant. He rose and laid his hand on Phil's shoulder.

"Phil, we must give that first place in our curriculum," he said.

"No," replied Phil instantly, "the first place must belong to the old, old stock maxim of the common or garden moralist, the supremacy of duty over self. I shall teach that myself; I happen to know the subject rather well."

Leuw looked at him in unspoken wonder, but Phil bore the scrutiny without a tremor. Leuw's voice was not very steady as he said:

"I hope you will take no offense—but perhaps there is a duty which, to my knowledge at least, you have not yet fulfilled."

"And that is?"

"Dulcie. You have a great opportunity of paying off to her what you owe to her mother. I know her uncle is providing for her, but probably she would prefer being dependent on one whose support she could claim as a matter of right. This"—he pointed to the open cheque—"is still at your disposal. You need only make it serve you till you have established the practice which, with your connection, ought not to take you long. Don't think me officious."

"I am to ask her to marry me?" exclaimed Phil, nearly off his feet with surprise. "What makes you say that?"

"You talked of duty," replied Leuw dully.

Phil smiled—a wan smile. "Thank you, Leuw, for

being jealous of my honor. But I can assure you that it is not involved here."

"Why not?" asked Leuw, though he felt the ineptness of the question.

"For the simplest reason in the world, she does not expect it of me."

"There is some one else?" exclaimed Leuw.

"Yes, there is. There is. . . ."

"You," Phil had been about to say, but he stopped short. He no longer owned the secret; he had no right to it. Effie had taken it back with everything else, her love, his happiness; he gulped down a silent sob.

Leuw had struggled for, and had obtained, mastery over himself. So he had come too late after all. His doubts, his hopes, his self-delusions had come to a tame and ignominious end. He ought to have known it, known it the moment Phil returned to his allegiance. That was a miracle, and no man dared expect that his life had room for more than one such. Well, then, he would make the most of the one that had been vouchsafed to him; he would hug it to himself tightly, nurse it tenderly; it had to act as deputy to him for everything else life had henceforth to offer.

He gripped his brother's hand till the latter winced; but it was nothing to the grip that held his own soul as he said:

"So, then, Phil, there is nothing but you and me—and the Scheme."

CHAPTER XXXI

"It's quite a month since he was here last, and he used to call at least once a week," Mrs. Duveen was saying, knitting her brows. "I wonder if we have done anything to offend him."

"You are an obstinate woman," replied Mr. Alexander rudely. "Pray, why shouldn't you take his word? I told you I met him some days ago, and he told me he was extremely busy. You know that he and Phil are going to start the Institute very shortly in temporary premises, and I can well understand that that makes heavy claims on his time."

"I mentioned the chance of his being offended, because you said that, when you taxed him with staying away so long, he appeared awkward and ill at ease," continued Mrs. Duveen. "Very possibly he was having something at the back of his mind. . . ."

"So has every hawker; much more so a man who keeps twenty clerks going," interrupted Mr. Alexander dryly. "Rose, I wish you wouldn't be so conceited as to think that because a man doesn't overrun you, you have given him a whole bundle of grievances to carry about. You don't understand these things. When a man says he's busy, it doesn't mean he is keeping his nose to the grindstone all day and all night; it means he hasn't an ounce of energy left to take him to or through anything else."

"Still, an hour once in a way," persisted Mrs. Duveen. Then her voice dropped. "Bram, perhaps he does not feel quite in his element here any more."

"I don't understand exactly what you mean, Rose."

"Well, when a young man has been living for eight years in a wilderness, and comes back to the temptations of a place like London . . ."

Mr. Alexander leaned forward, and assuming a mysterious look, whispered to her: "You have hit the nail on the head, Rose; he is going to the bad as fast as the devil has time to drive him."

"Oh, Bram, it isn't really true?"

"I beg your pardon, my dear; I am afraid I startled you rather badly," returned Mr. Alexander, laughing penitently. "But you know you really deserved some punishment. What made you suggest anything so absurd? You have seen enough of Leuw Lipcott to feel sure that he would not go off his balance whatever the provocation. It distresses me to see you commit such errors of judgment at your time of life."

"I am very glad it was an error," said Mrs. Duveen, with evident relief. "It was because I had got to like him so much that it gave me such a shock; and then I was thinking of his mother. Still, you will perhaps admit that the young men nowadays are not exactly plain sailing. I fancied I had made a pretty close study of Phil, but I wish I knew what construction to put on him of late," she added suppressing a sigh.

"He has been a little mysterious—there's no denying it," said Mr. Alexander, very soberly. "Of course, he has tried to disguise it as well as he could, but one can't get away from the fact that he has taken to paying us duty calls, Rose. He doesn't seem at home here—nor anywhere else either, for the matter of that. He has got the look of a man who finds the world a very narrow place to be in."

"I am certain it is Effie," rejoined Mrs. Duveen. "You remember what I told you about the two some weeks ago."

"Well, then, why doesn't he run down to Eastbourne to see her instead of mooning about here in this absurd fashion?"

"That is what puzzles me so much, Bram. There seemed to be some fanciful arrangement about not making the engagement public for some days. And then came that bank affair which, although I tried hard not to show it, left me for the time being unfit to deal with anything but the most elementary facts of life. It was only after Effie had taken her mother to the seaside that it suddenly came home to me there had been no definite announcement."

"I certainly have heard nothing official about it," said Mr. Alexander, shaking his head grimly. "But I don't see the point of your standing on ceremony like that. Why didn't you ask Phil right out?"

"The mere fact of my having to ask was proof that he had nothing to tell, or that he did not want to; and to tax him would have embarrassed me much more than him."

"A very sensible explanation," nodded Mr. Alexander; "I wish you would always be so careful about your feelings. Still, that does not help us over the stile. Perhaps, though, there may be a chance of finding out from Effie herself. I understand she will be back to-morrow or the day after."

"I shouldn't like to try it," said Mrs. Duveen hastily; "it would be like striking matches to find your way in a powder magazine. The only plan, I am afraid, is to keep quiet and watch developments. But it is very disagreeable all the same."

"Most awkwardly disagreeable," corroborated her brother.

And then he followed Mrs. Duveen's example, and made a close investigation of the pattern of the carpet. After a full minute's silence he continued:

"And now that we have got each other into such a magnificent moping fit, we may as well make the most of our opportunity. Rose, Dulcie is going distinctly off color."

"What, has it struck you too?" came her anxious query.

"H'm. It appears, then, we have each been waiting for the other to mention it," Mr. Alexander replied fiercely. "Rose, we ought to be ashamed of ourselves—no, we oughtn't; it will only waste more time. We must take instant action to make up for our gross and culpable negligence."

"By all means. I shall take her to see Dr. Black to-morrow."

"You will do nothing of the sort. We are not going to frighten her into fancying there is something the matter with her. There isn't; take my word for it, although I haven't a dozen letters after my name. A little change, a little lifting out of the groove is all she wants; and what's more, she is going to have it."

"You mean, Bram . . ."

"I mean we'll go aroaming for six months or so. Do you think she will object?"

"I don't know. She won't quite like the idea of leaving her Girls' Club and the 'Happy Evenings' so long."

"Won't she?" asked Mr. Alexander, bristling. "We'll see about that. Once we have got her under

weigh she is at our mercy. You see, I am not consulting your pleasure in the matter at all, because you will have to come along anyhow. We'll get it over at once. Where is she?"

"Upstairs. I shall send for her," said Mrs. Duveen readily.

"I notice she always has to be sent for now," grumbled her brother, continuing in the strain till Dulcie appeared on the scene.

It was patent at a glance that the solicitude of the two older people was not altogether without foundation. Dulcie's eyes looked heavy, and the outline of her face showed a distinct approach to angles. Her manner, too, had undergone a change; it had lost its old spontaneous vivacity, and the tutored alertness which had taken its place was a poor substitute.

"You wanted me," she said, her glance roving uncertainly from her mother to her uncle, and back again. "Now, please, Uncle Bram—no lectures; you look like it," she added, smiling at him feebly.

"Oh, dear, no," replied the latter hastily; "it's something else altogether, though your expecting a scolding is strong evidence of a guilty conscience. We only want to ask you to be good enough to pack up your trunks and hold yourself ready for marching orders. You see," he continued, forestalling her enquiry, "I have always understood that there are a few things worth looking at outside this estimable country of ours, and I have at last made up my mind to go and see for myself. Besides, I really want a decent holiday. So does your mother; she has just confessed to me that a recent disagreeable event has had considerably more effect on her nerves than either

of us guessed. Of course, you yourself are right as a trivet, but I know you won't be so unkind as to let us two oldsters maunder along deaf and dumb through the Continental Babel."

"I shall come, if you want me to; when do we start?" asked Dulcie.

Mr. Alexander collapsed. Under cover of his specious misrepresentations, he was girding up his loins for a tough tussle. But this unlooked-for evaporating of the opposition gave him an unpleasant sensation of being foiled and fooled—so much so that he nearly betrayed the true state of things as, ignoring her question, he growled at his niece:

"You don't quite seem transported with delight at the idea!"

"I confess, I am not particularly keen on it at present, but, as they say, the appetite comes in eating," replied Dulcie with a half-hearted smile.

"It will only be the worse for you if it doesn't," said Mr. Alexander formidably. "Well, Rose, when can you be ready—to-morrow, or the day after?"

"What are you thinking of, Bram?" remonstrated Mrs. Duveen indignantly. "You must give us a week at least."

Mr. Alexander chafed at the delay, and said so. Mrs. Duveen insisted, and the discussion became tolerably animated. But despite appeals from both sides, Dulcie refused to become entangled in the altercation. It was only when she grew conscious how strange her indifference must appear that she interfered at all.

"Well, you can tell me afterwards what decision you have come to; in any case, I shall only have a few

days to arrange for somebody to look after the Club, and I must write at once."

"Oh, by the way," exclaimed Mrs. Duveen, as Dulcie was leaving the room, "while you are writing, you may as well drop a note to as many of our friends as you can to tell them we are leaving. We shan't have any time for 'p. p. c.' visits. There is one especially I don't want you to forget—Phil's brother."

"Your mother has got an idea into her head that we have somehow given offense to him," explained Mr. Alexander. "Do you happen to be able to account for his long absence?"

Dulcie stared at him wide-eyed, as though frightened, and then breathing a "No" went slowly out. Arrived at her room she told herself that the reason why Uncle Bram's question had taken her aback was because it was the one she had asked herself persistently for the past three weeks; and she feared that with those keen, shrewd eyes of his he had read it in her face. That would be, indeed, terrible. She did not mind wrestling with her perplexity in solitude and silence, but to know somebody at the peephole, though that somebody be her nearest and dearest, would rob her of all her strength; and what would happen then she could not tell, and the mystery of it terrified her.

And now, once more, and for the hundredth time—why did he not come? For the hundredth time also she passed in review the incidents of their last meeting to see if it contained anything whereat he might reasonably have taken umbrage; and for the hundredth time she had to declare herself guiltless. On the contrary, as far as she could remember, it had seemed the

beginning of a finer understanding between them, a subtler sympathy, which made itself felt not in what they said, but in what they left unsaid. And then this summary, inexplicable halt, just at the moment when a few more steps seemed all that was necessary to . . . That, indeed, was the only possible interpretation which had suggested itself to her: he had noticed he was going too far, and he had pulled himself up in time. But the next instant she recoiled at the idea of setting him down for a futile, irresponsible trifle. No, far sooner she would take the blame on herself. It was she who had mistaken the situation, and had put the wrong value on his visits. Her overtures it had been which had led to their compact of mutual confidence. He had met her half-considered advances with good-humored complacency, but had reserved himself the choice of continuing or growing tired as he pleased. Evidently he had chosen the latter, and now—and now she was paying the penalty of her imprudence. It was a heavy penalty. She recollected how she had consulted Effie, whom she had deemed wise in the ways of love; if she had waited but a little longer, there would have been no need for her to seek another's counsel and pay in return an extravagant fee—the confession of her secret. For by now she had acquired very great wisdom of her own, and knew the meaning of the strange antics which her heart was playing. She knew who and what was responsible for her restlessness and discontent, for the loneliness and sense of void, which seemed to have become her inalienable portion. A huge gap divided her from the affairs of life, from the things that were most desirable. If she had at all lacked

proof, she had received it just now, when she had listened with callous apathy to the offer of gratifying the ardent wish of so many years—of seeing with her own eyes the manifold wonders of distant lands. She argued her own utter nervelessness in that she was too unstrung merely to feign the gladness she did not feel. Well, though she could not make of her travels a joy for their own sake, she must see that they should at least not go altogether purposeless. They should be to her the quest after the peace of mind she had lost; they should be a tonic, stringing tight the lax sinews of her soul, so that when she came back she should be ready to take up her life anew—a stronger, more forceful, more valuable life, such as can only be lived by those who have purged themselves of the great besetting weakness, which, more than the sum total of all its other flaws, makes humanity the slave and knave of circumstances.

She would have preferred not to see Leuw again before her departure from London; but for obvious reasons she could not refuse to obey her mother's injunction. And on the other hand, perhaps, it was better she should not shun this final trial. It was just as well that she should take accurate measure of the hold he had gained on her, and so impress on herself indelibly the necessity of sterilizing his influence before she would step again into the sphere of its scope. And besides, another pang or two—what did it matter? And she sat down to pen the note with a self-possession which tricked her into an exultant belief that the crisis lay already behind her. But presently she knew better, for she had almost lost count of the number of drafts she had made, before she was satis-

fied that neither wording nor penmanship gave token that they had cost her a single tremor of heart or hand.

And, indeed, when the letter reached Leuw the next day, he saw in it nothing but a politely worded, neatly written intimation that Mrs. Duveen would be glad if he would take an opportunity within the next few days of coming to wish them God-speed on their expedition. The writer of the note said nothing as to whether she endorsed the invitation; though Leuw perused it at least a dozen times, there was not a syllable which might even distantly be construed into such an endorsement. Finally, as though to set the seal on his ill success, he called himself a fool for his pains. But he did not get rid of his annoyance with that. It increased as he harked back to his receipt of the missive, and he remembered how the first sight of the handwriting on the envelope had sent the blood furiously to his head, only to set him presently shivering as though with ague. And that after weeks—at least so the world reckoned it—of laboriously nursed indifference to everything but the most immediate facts of life and an over-ears immersion in the whirlpool of the day's bustle and business. Just one little touch, and here he was astir again to the insidious memories to which he was beginning to think himself deaf and blind and blunt; just one faint echo, and the old undertone of his soul, which he had done his best to tread, frighten, strangle into silence, boomed out again loud in full, sonorous responsiveness.

He leaned back in his chair, staring before him in sullen helplessness. No doubt he was a clever man of business, but he was a miserable bungler so far as

the economy of his heart was concerned. He had made a decided failure of that. All these years he had heaped and hoarded his love, refusing to expend a single grain of it, because he had hoped one day to bestow it where any man might have been proud to bestow it. And now, what was he going to do with it, with the dead weight, the refuse, unmarketable stock, to which it had turned and which was pressing him to earth? But no; he must not talk like that. It was rank irreverence against the idol he had reared on a pedestal so high that at times he felt doubtful where his earthly creed ended and his divine belief began. And that being so, it was impossible that his deal should be altogether bad. There must be some virtue in it after all. Probably it required only a little wise manipulation to convert what at first appeared to him an irredeemable loss into a considerable profit. Well, he would try. Because a thing was not a vaulting board, he need not make of it a millstone; and the love he bore Dulcie, and always would bear her, was yet to take upon itself its rightful function as the mainspring of his life. He owed it to his self-respect not to be insincere to himself; and yet, what had become of his resolution that he would be satisfied with her friendship, should—should other things fail? In the light of his conduct during the past month it must seem nothing short of a piece of puerile bravado. He knew he could count on her friendship, however much her heart might belong to the "some one else." He would recoup himself with that. He would make it a strong factor for good, an impetus to tenser earnestness and greater endeavor—it should become the censor, nay, the guardian of his

every word and thought and act. So he would rehabilitate his credit with himself. The letter he had just received had, indeed, come opportunely; a little later, and it might have found him too perverse to listen to the pleadings of his higher interests.

It was in this spirit of recantation that he made his call on Mrs. Duveen that same evening, soon after his office hours, having vainly urged Phil to accompany him. Phil's excuse was a headache; Leuw remarked to himself that Phil had of late become strangely subject to headaches. Probably it was the reaction after the hard work he had gone through previous to his examination.

As Leuw entered the sitting-room, he found there nobody but Mrs. Duveen. She rose to meet him smilingly.

"Perhaps you think your prompt response will atone for your long desertion of us," she said. "If you do, you expect from us a simply angelic power of forbearance."

He stood looking at her, but not with any uncertainty what to reply. It would be more than despicable to prevaricate to this sweet, frank soul, which seemed to take all men for evangelists and all life for gospel.

"The way you say that is already much more than I could expect," he answered her quietly. "Apologies would be a poor return for it. So here is the truth. I had a reason for staying away. Some day, though it may be years hence, I shall tell you what it was."

"That is charming and honest of you," she rejoined pleasantly, although her face clouded somewhat. "Are

you sure, however, that this same reason does not apply still?"

"The reason still applies, but it has lost most of its force," was his guarded reply.

And then by tacit consent the subject was eschewed, and the conversation fell naturally on the contemplated tour abroad. Not very long afterwards Mr. Alexander came in, made a jesting reference or two to Leuw's re-appearance, and, in accordance with long-standing custom, enquired immediately for Dulcie. Mrs. Duveen informed him that Effie had wired that afternoon the time of her arrival, and that Dulcie had gone to the station to meet her.

"I expect her in, though, every moment; I suppose she is helping Effie to unpack. You see, she has to put Effie under an obligation; we shall want plenty of help next week," added Mrs. Duveen, with a smile at Leuw, which the latter returned, but not over-successfully. "By the way, I hope she will persuade the two of them to come round here for dinner."

A quarter of an hour later Mrs. Duveen's hope was gratified by the appearance of Dulcie, accompanied by Mrs. Elkin and Effie. There were effusive greetings between the older people, in the midst of which Dulcie came up to Leuw, and proffered her hand. Nothing but a commonplace salutation passed between them. She gave no spoken hint that his presence was anything out of the ordinary course of events, or that it called for any special comment. But had Leuw not been occupied too greatly with his own feelings, he could not have helped noticing that on the face of it there was something studied in this indifference, and that at the very least it could be construed into pique.

As it was, his thoughts chiefly concentrated themselves on wondering whether an African tan of eight years standing was strong enough to mask his sudden ebb of color. Mr. Alexander's importunate call to table rescued them from what threatened to be an awkward silence. Leuw saw nothing strange in it that Dulcie should forestall a recurrence of the predicament by giving him Mrs. Elkin for neighbor. Why, indeed, should she discomfort herself by directing her words to him, when doubtless her thoughts were far and distant, with that mysterious "some one else?" He harped almost vindictively on the phrase, forgetting that it was one of his own coining.

However, the conversation over, dinner showed no trace of the emotional cross-currents agitating at least two components of the little gathering. For one thing, there was no lack of material. Effie was fluent and amusing enough in her account of their Eastbourne experiences. She seemed to have recovered her usual high spirits, discounting the impression only by an occasional hardness about the mouth, which found its counterpart in some harsh and bitter speech. Mr. Alexander was full of the projected tour, and entered with great gusto into the details of his arrangements, in the forethought and thoroughness of which he evinced evident self-satisfaction. And Leuw, instead of feeling, as he had fully expected, that he was passing through an ordeal, found himself presently taking an intelligent interest in the proceedings, and eventually even followed them with a sort of wary enjoyment. It was only when his eyes lighted on Dulcie that the graver issues of the occasion came upon him, and made him wince at the prospect of

bleak, dreary days still to be battled through. He had so far not made up his mind whether he should ask Dulcie in so many words for what he required of her, or whether he should allow her to guess from the mere fact of his presence that he was bent on resuming their old amicable relations. He preferred the latter; the former alternative was so much more difficult. He might submit his request clumsily, and would let her see that he knew more about the affairs of her inmost heart than he had a right to know; and by making her angry, he might foil his own ends. Still he would see how events shaped; the evening was young yet.

Dinner had come to a close, but Mr. Alexander was still in full swing; and being loath to interrupt himself, he asked and obtained leave for himself and Leuw to smoke their cigars in the dining-room. Effie's attention, however, seemed to have become exhausted, for a minute or two later she slipped away over to the window, drew back the hangings and gazed out.

"Dulcie, come here and look," she called presently.

Dulcie obeyed readily, and almost simultaneously Leuw gave way to the impulse which lifted him up, and followed her.

"May I look, too?" he asked with jesting humility.

The two girls silently made room for him in the window niche. It was, indeed, a sight to hold the eye and the tongue captive. The grand, spacious garden lay bathed in moonlight down to its uttermost verge. Its trees and hedgerows stood out delicately against a background of silver; they had doffed the air of stubborn sullenness they had worn all the winter, and now seemed softening back into the joy of life at the

first presage of the spring. Over it all hung a gracious stillness, a penetrating peace, which was as a message of good-will and reconciliation to Mother Earth and all the multitudinous progeny that was hers.

Dulcie was the first to speak, but she did it in a whisper:

"Oh, I can't stand here just looking at it—I must feel it. Come, Effie."

"I should like to, but remember I have had four hours of train to-day." Then with a quick after-thought: "Perhaps you, Mr. Lipcott . . ."

"I was just about to offer myself," interposed Leuw, trying to hide his eagerness beneath a tone of measured courtesy.

Dulcie answered him with a swift look of distrust.

"But only on condition that you make yourself thoroughly air-tight," he went on with a smile. "You see, I shall be responsible for you to your mother."

Mrs. Duveen readily gave her assent, only adding her own admonition to Leuw's, and the two went out into the hall, where Dulcie wrapped herself up securely, and from there into the open.

They were nearly half-way down the sidewalk before either spoke.

"There is no danger of our damaging the chrysanthemums to-night," said Leuw, half aloud.

"What, do you remember that?" she asked, in pleased surprise.

"Certainly; why shouldn't I?"

"It's such a little thing, and so long ago," she explained, not without some confusion.

"Yes, very long ago," he confirmed pensively.

"Would you like to change back?" she asked, more lightly.

"It would be no use to me. I think I was as old then as I am now."

"You ought to be glad that you can say that. If eight years made no difference to you, it means you will never be really old."

"It might mean that I was never really young," was his retort.

"Yes, probably your construction is the right one—at least you ought to know best. And to tell the truth, you always did give me the impression that you were born with your world ready-made. You seem to have accepted the people and things that entered into it afterwards with a sort of silent protest."

His breath came short at the unconscious irony of her words. His world complete and fulfilled? His world was a void, a chaos, into which he was dying to drag her with pæans of thanksgiving, for without her it would never know the blessings of light and order. And he dared not even tell her so.

"Did you think it worth your while to make such a close study of me?" he asked turning on her suddenly.

"But I didn't make a study of you. I wasn't so presumptuous. What I said just now, I must have learned by a flash of inspiration. And now, please, it's your turn."

"My turn? For what?"

"For saying something nice to me. I made out that you were an unfathomable mystery, everybody likes to be told that. So you owe me a compliment in return. Do let us keep up the game."

He paused. Neither the manner nor the matter of her remark struck him pleasurably. It was more

than mere flippancy; it was—as far as he had cognizance of these things—a distinct attempt at coquetry. At first he only thought how inconsistent with her true self that was; but then it came home to him that, knowing what he knew, he ought to construe it into a direct offense against himself. Perhaps she was only practicing on him for the benefit of the “some one else.” And his displeased surprise veered round to downright irritation.

“Well, haven’t you thought of anything to say yet?” she prompted him with a laugh.

“I don’t think the game is worthy of you,” he replied brusquely.

“Why, now you have said it without wanting to,” she pointed out to him, essaying to repeat her laugh, but getting no further than a faint echo of it. “However, I will take your hint.”

Her ready deference to his mood made him instantly repentant.

“I suppose you are looking forward to your tour with great pleasure,” he said, very gently.

“It must be very pleasant to see new sights—you probably can speak to that from your own experience,” was the evasive reply.

“And you, of course, will have the additional advantage of taking your family circle along with you, so you will have no occasion for homesickness,” he went on rapidly. “By the way, will there be anybody besides the three of you?”

“No. I thought you understood that,” she replied, not without some surprise.

“I mean, perhaps somebody is coming to join you later on the road.”

Her surprise grew. "I don't know who would take the trouble. Why, what makes you think that?"

"I really don't know," he answered in confusion. "I had an idea that you might have made some such arrangement, especially as I gather that your tour might be a rather extended one."

He walked on a little faster, as though to get away from the sensation of shame which had come upon him suddenly. He felt like a man who has narrowly escaped being detected in some shabby device. Ever since he had been led to assume that she was lost to him, he had not been sensible of any curiosity as to whose great good fortune it had been to have found her. Once or twice he had in an idle sort of wonder gone through the list of the men whom he had met at the house. He had to admit that there was not a single one to whom Dulcie's bearing—and he had watched her very closely—had been anything more than either coldly courteous, or good-naturedly tolerant. Perhaps he had missed him on his visits, perhaps it was somebody out of town—he had frequently heard names mentioned in terms that denoted long-standing acquaintance—names, which to him, however, were nothing but names. They had concerned him but little till just before, when the jealous impulse seized him mightily if momentarily, and drove him, as it were, into laying a snare for her. He was thankful he had failed; the failure was the only thing to redeem him.

"This is the spot," he heard her say the next instant.

He caught her meaning in a flash. "Where we became castaways, and had to wait for relief," he supplemented, quite soberly.

"In a way it ought to be historic," she said with a laugh of embarrassment.

This time he did not follow her so readily. "Do you mean because of the extract from ancient history Phil treated us to at the time?"

Her mirth became more genuine. "I never thought of that. No"—her voice hung with grave and sustained emphasis on the monosyllable—"was it not here that we vowed eternal friendship?"

He turned on her with eager scrutiny. What, more flippancy, more . . .? But no, she was serious, quite serious. He could be absolutely certain of it; the moonlight told him no untruth.

"Yes, we did, we did," was his quick reply.

"And how—it will seem a strange question to you—how do you think we kept our vow?"

"I shall only speak for myself. I know I always have kept it, and, come what may, always shall keep it."

He felt cowed and yet exhilarated at the coincidence which played so strangely into his hands.

But she shook her head slowly. "No, I can't agree with you—as to the past, at any rate"—came from her deliberately. "Do you know, Mr. Lipcott, I have a good right to be angry with you?"

"Angry with me?" he repeated.

"Yes," she said. "During the first few weeks after your return, at the time when we really came into each other's cognizance, you led me to believe that you considered my help, however indirect, would be of some avail to you. And then, after buoying me up with the hope, after fanning my aspirations into flame, you change your mind. Do you think that was fair?"

He understood her at once, but surprise kept him silent.

"I felt the humiliation of it deeply," she went on, more animated. "The only conclusion I could draw was that you did not think me fit to be anything more than an intelligent listener to the planning of the work, who, when it got beyond that, was to be set aside as a mere encumbrance. If, at least, you had told me so frankly, it would have been less galling than to be left to find it out for myself—by being so completely ignored. I am aware, from purely outside sources, that your Scheme will come into operation very shortly. I know you have acquired the temporary premises in which your Institute is to make its bow to the world, and that you have nearly completed all your final arrangements. But of the inner workings I know nothing. I tried to probe Phil whenever I had the occasion. His answers were mere make-shifts; the upshot of them was a kind of 'Don't bother; everything will be all right.' And that when I thought myself entitled, from your assurances, to be allowed behind the scenes, to be allowed to watch. . . . But there; what does it matter? Please say you don't think my remonstrances unreasonable; try and make allowances for me. People like you, whose lives day in, day out, are nothing but action, and again action, can hardly understand the—what shall I call it?—the work-hunger of those condemned to comparative dronehood."

He was still wrestling with his thoughts, his words; and before he quite knew he had mastered either, he answered.

"Yes, you ought to be angry. I broke my word,

and what is more, I did it consciously—I knew it all the time. What I did not know, what I never came near to dreaming, was that you would lay it to heart a hundredth part as much as you seem to have done. But I shall also tell you this, that you did not lose by it a hundredth part of what I did. Beyond that I can give you no explanation.”

“I don’t require any, not in the least,” she broke in hastily; “I shall be content if, having acknowledged your—your breach of faith, you will do your best to redeem it. I do so much want to have my share in the work. I am afraid that if I don’t take my place before the start, others will step in, and there will be no room for me. That is—I admit it frankly—what robs our intended tour of half its pleasure for me. And then there is another point—it may strike you as a piece of feminine vanity. You made me rise ever so high in my own estimation when you told me what good you thought it possible for me to achieve. I don’t want to think that you had gone back on that opinion; I want to—well, to rehabilitate myself. And the only way you can do that is to give me your promise of the place you once said I could fill.”

“Then you really care what I think of you?” he asked eagerly.

“Will you promise?” was the counter-question that glanced off his own.

“Yes,” he replied, manifestly disappointed.

“But don’t flatter yourself that I shall take your mere word for it, especially as you are making the promise under pressure,” she continued almost gaily.

“This spot”—they were still standing among the

chrysanthemums—"is propitious for making compacts; at least we have already made one here; let us make our second here as well. Don't be afraid; I am not going to exact from you a heavy guarantee. Only this."

Smilingly she held out her hand to him. He took it and held it, second after second, as though he had absolutely forgotten to let it go; she did not remind him. So they stood, looking at each other without a word. A few minutes ago the distance of space between them had been as miles; and now it was dwindling down to its proper span, a span of inches. All at once the grip of his fingers tightened frantically on hers; the inches lessened. And presently they were close together, each feeling the magnetic current from the other's heart, and gathering into themselves with tingling gladness the mutual message it conveyed to them. That was all. The fence and foil of circumstance, the parry of cross-purposes that had used them so cruelly, it all availed nothing. Phil's Kismet was brilliantly vindicated. It had been destined, and they had found each other. The chrysanthemums nodded very wisely as their whisper went round among them: "We knew it all along, ever since that time, eight years ago."

"I have so many things to say, so much to ask, so much to wonder at," he breathed into her ear.

"So have I," she replied, with something like a sob; "but not now. We have plenty of time before us."

"Plenty of time?" he repeated exultantly. "Of course, we have; my life is only just beginning."

"And so is mine," she added; "but still, we must

not forget all about the other people we knew before we lived."

"Yes, the other people. Come, we'll go and tell them."

And so they went, still holding each other by the hand, along the garden walk, up the terrace steps, through the hall, into the room—all the way hand-in-hand, like two playmate children, who, after their little quarrel, have once more returned to good accord.

Mrs. Duveen and Mrs. Elkin were sitting at a game of cribbage, with Mr. Alexander close by, giving both impartially advice. But not being so engrossed as the players, he was the first to look up as the two entered. His look grew to a stare.

"What on earth have you young ones been up to?" he cried. "Look, Rose!"

But Mrs. Duveen was too late, for the next instant Dulcie, having wound herself loose, was hiding her face on her mother's shoulder. Leuw followed more leisurely, trying to bear his happiness meekly.

"You wanted to know why I stayed away so long," he said, catching Mrs. Duveen's eagerly questioning eyes; "here is the reason; it's just kissing you. May I have it for good—mother?"

"I am so glad, so glad," was the shape her consent took, while Mr. Alexander, with greater control of his speech, blessed himself and "well-I-nevered" as he had never done in his life.

"Where is Effie?" asked Dulcie, lifting her head suddenly, to look round.

"I thought she went out to join you in the garden," said Mrs. Elkin.

"I must go and find her," said Dulcie, asking



"AND HAPPENED TO LOOK THROUGH THE WINDOW AT THE
WRONG TIME."

Leuw's permission with a glance; "she will never forgive me if I don't . . ."

And with that she was out in the hall speeding up the stairs to her own room. As she stepped in, Effie came towards her, and kissed her with quiet lovingness as she said:

"I hope you will be very happy, Dulse, dear."

"How do you know?" gasped the latter.

"Don't think I was spying. I couldn't stand the talk downstairs, it made my head burst; and I should break your piano if I sat down to it. So I came up here, and happened to look through the window at the wrong time."

There was a pause. "Well, Effie, are we going to be sisters-in-law?" queried Dulcie finally.

"No, dear; that is all done with," answered Effie setting her lips tightly.

"But why—why?" insisted Dulcie miserably. "How much longer is this wretched misunderstanding between you two to last? Effie, you just said you hoped I would be happy. How can you expect me to be when you put me on the rack like this?"

"You are quite right," said Effie pensively; "I dare not refuse you anything to-night. I shall tell you what there is to tell; but it won't make you happier."

"At any rate I shall not have to grope in the dark any longer; and that will be something."

"You are wrong about the misunderstanding," said Effie resolutely; "there is none—absolutely none. Both he and I know exactly what drove us apart; we thought and fought it out on a fair field. There was his parliamentary career. He knew how I had set my heart on it; he gave it up, presumably to have his

hands free for that old idiosyncrasy of his—the Scheme. I gave him his choice, and, like a sensible man, he took it. That is all.”

“Of course, he gave you his reasons,” said Dulcie quickly.

Effie shrugged her shoulders. “He wanted to; I would not listen.”

“Would not listen? Why not? That is the least he could claim.”

“It seemed to me impossible he could have any strong enough. And then I was afraid he would talk me over with—with plausibilities, which would convince me on the surface, and yet leave the sting of my first dissatisfaction deep down in my heart.”

“In that case, you were certainly wise,” said Dulcie speciously. “But still, I thought as a mere matter of curiosity. . . .”

“I would have given half my life to know,” interrupted Effie.

“Shall I tell you?”

“How can you know?” asked Effie with the very faintest tinge of scorn.

“I know—because I know Phil,” said Dulcie undaunted. “Do you remember how the old song puts it: ‘I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not honor more’! That will give you the keynote to his conduct. When it came to a tug of war between conscience and love, conscience pulled stronger, but the victory was really with love.”

“Yes, quite so,” came bitterly from Effie; “there you have it. Honor, conscience, and all the paraphernalia of the sophist.”

Dulcie smiled patiently. “Tell me, Effie, would

you have been content to know that things went on smoothly between you, only because Phil did not have the courage to acknowledge himself a renegade? Would it not have made you feel like an accomplice?"

"Renegade? That is a very strong word."

"It is the word he used himself. Could you suggest any other? He had taken on himself a sacred obligation. You may dub it an idiosyncrasy, but you must admit he has a right to his own view. And you should not have stood in his way when the call came to him to redeem himself. I can understand your setting him the choice as a test, and then feeling glad and proud that his decision went against you. Doesn't it strike you he has done what not one man in a thousand could do?"

"Yes, but I can put several constructions on that," returned Effie gloomily.

"Put on the best, then," begged Dulcie. "Believe that what he did was the best for the two of you. He went back to this first duty of his with his eyes wide open. He would not put on you the indignity of becoming wife to a man who had turned his back on the great principle of his life; and as for himself—well, how could he do justice to your love, with his self-reproach continually taunting him into secret discontent? Effie, you must give in."

"If there is to be any giving in, why must it come from me?" cried Effie with a last effort of rebelling.

"So as to convince yourself that he is stronger than you," replied Dulcie firmly. "Effie, there are millions of women in the world who would bless their fate for the privilege of being able to yield, for knowing that the man they are coupled to is not a reed nor

a weakling, that he has strength enough and wisdom enough for the two of them, so that they can merge their destiny blindly, confidently in his. Effie, you would lose half your faith in him, if you found it was he who had bridged the gulf instead of you."

Effie looked at her with a glance which Dulcie felt going through and through. Then Effie said slowly:

"Dulcie, I can only say this—you are a wonder. How you can argue like that, when all the time your heart is soaring sky-high, is unearthly. But for all that, don't flatter yourself. It is not your arguments that tell with me; it is yourself; it is the knowledge of your happiness, and the knowledge that I could be as happy—if I liked."

"If you can be, then it is a sin that you are not," replied Dulcie with glowing cheeks. "If you can be, I tell you, throw everything else to the wind—your doubts, your pride, your chances of the fame you aspire to. The exchange is worth it."

"You dear, passionate, little silly," cried Effie, catching her in her arms; "do you think you are telling me news? Why, I knew all that; I had tasted it, digested it, long before you had an inkling you would ever do likewise. But I am grateful to you for all that. I wanted somebody to make me the pace; I should have died of chagrin and jealousy to see you so happy, while I . . ."

Gently she pushed Dulcie from her, and commenced to fumble in the folds of her dress, producing from there presently a neat little paper scroll. She unrolled it hastily, and without another glance at it, deliberately tore it through the middle.

"Oh, what is that?" cried Dulcie a little frightened.

"Only my agreement with the agent. I had to carry it about with me while we were away. Phil will know what I mean when he sees it like this. Quick, an envelope. I am not going to waste another minute."

"Don't you think you might write him just a word besides?" asked Dulcie, as she saw Effie proceeding to fasten it up.

Effie looked at her dubiously. "Ought I?" she reflected aloud. "Well, I suppose I had better. You have been engineering this business right through, so I must follow your advice."

She sat down and scribbled a few words.

"Stamp?" asked Dulcie.

"No, I don't think I shall want one," replied Effie, putting the missive into her pocket. "And now please come down—there's no more mischief left for you to do up here."

Two or three friends had dropped in during their absence, and Dulcie became very busy gathering in her harvest of congratulations. Leuw stood close by her side—a smiling Cerberus. However, he did not stay very late.

"I want to go and tell mother," he whispered to her.

"And I want to go and make certain it isn't a dream," she whispered back; "but to-morrow, very early, yes?"

"To-morrow, very early," he affirmed solemnly.

They were standing in the hall, when Effie came gliding up to them.

"I beg pardon for interrupting," she said meekly; "but will you see your brother yet to-night?"

"Yes, I intended to drop in on him for a moment," said Leuw.

"Then do you mind giving him this?" she continued, handing him the envelope. "But you must not forget—it is very particular."

"Yes, very particular," testified Dulcie.

And then, on Effie's withdrawal, her lips shyly but without shrinking testified to something else.

Leuw stepped out into the night, which to him was transfigured into a glamour and radiance incomparable to the brightest sunrise he had ever known. He hailed an opportunely passing cab, with a shout that gave the driver some trouble in bringing his horse to a standstill, and arrived at Rupert Street before he had felt the motion of the wheels.

The streak of light through the chinks of the shutter told him that Phil was in. He knocked and entered. Phil rose from the perusing of the ponderous law volume before him, and faced his brother with a look of half-hearted enquiry. His face showed pitifully drawn and haggard beneath the lamplight.

"What is it, Leuw?" he asked, with some little show of interest. "You haven't come here for nothing."

"No, I haven't," acquiesced Leuw, successfully keeping his features under control. "I came to tell you of an important discovery I made to-night. Phil, I love Dulcie."

"Well?" asked Phil, this time with genuine eagerness.

"A month ago you told me there was some one else."

"That need not prevent your trying."

"What is the use—when she has made her choice of the other man?"

"Who said so?" cried Phil vehemently.

"You did."

Phil's lips moved, but when he eventually spoke, it was clear his words were other than those dictated by his first impulse.

"Leuw, I implore you—try."

Leuw shook his head with a pretense of despairing obstinacy.

"By the way—I am to give you this," he said.

Phil took the little packet, which bore no superscription, with nonchalant indifference. He opened it negligently, drew out the torn agreement, and looked at it, dazed and vacantly. Again and again he looked, and still did not understand. So Dulcie's suggestion was a happy one after all; it saved him quite a minute of doubt—such a minute, as might have made a difference to any man's sanity. But the accompanying message said clearly enough:

"I prefer breaking this to breaking my heart. Come."

But despite the sudden impact of gladdening certainty, which almost made more havoc of him than his previous bewilderment, his first thought was for his brother. His half-share in Dulcie's secret had come back to him, just when the need for it was most imminent; and, of course, he could do with it what he liked.

"Leuw, the some one else is yourself—I swear it," he cried exultantly.

Leuw gripped the outstretched hand in both of his, as he replied, mischief and triumph blending in his voice:

"Phil, Phil, aren't you ashamed to let yourself get hoaxed like this? Didn't you see I knew? Forgive the little joke."

"Forgive? I will do more than that: I will laugh with you. Well, what are we waiting for? Let's go and take mother the finest present she ever had—two daughters at one time. Leuw, isn't this the best of all the best possible worlds?"

.

It stands to reason that the projected journey abroad was unceremoniously hustled out of its place in the catalogue of immediate events. Neither Mrs. Duveen nor Mr. Alexander was particularly grieved at not having to exchange the secure comforts of their home-life for the doubtful amenities of Continental wear and tear. Besides, their main object had been already brilliantly achieved—a thing which Dulcie lost no time to make plain to them. The topic which occupied most attention was the forthcoming semi-formal opening of the provisional premises of the Institute. Leuw and Phil had decided to make it an almost private function, so as to prevent anything in the nature of an anti-climax, when the permanent Foundation would come to be inaugurated. The Scheme had already secured a number of influential well-wishers, and its propaganda promised hopefully for the future.

It was on the day appointed for the opening that Leuw called for Dulcie at an early hour of the forenoon.

"I want you to come and be introduced to a very great friend of mine, dearest," he said.

"With pleasure, but don't you think it a rather unorthodox time for paying a visit?" she asked.

"Oh, he won't mind; he is at home at any hour of the day," smiled Leuw.

"We must go by train; he lives some little way out into the country," he informed her, as they stepped out.

An hour later they got out at the suburban station, and presently had left behind them the last of the small cluster of private residences adjoining it.

"We are nearly there, dear," said Leuw re-assuringly.

Dulcie looked about her in wonder. "Why, I don't see any houses—and here is a cemetery."

"That is where my friend lives," said Leuw solemnly.

She clutched him by the arm eagerly. "Oh, I know whom you mean, dear—the old man I have once or twice heard vaguely mentioned, the one who loved you so much and was so good to you."

"The same," affirmed Leuw gravely. "And he was good to me. Without him, perhaps, there would have been no success in life for me, no Scheme—no Dulcie."

"Don't say that," she pleaded, clinging to him more closely. "It makes me tremble to think that it was all an accident. It wasn't, Leuw. Give him all the credit that is his due. But I am certain that even if the opportunity had not been thrust on you, as it were, you would somehow have managed to snatch it for yourself, and everything would have been just as it is."

"I see, you want to keep your good opinion of me, and not have my genius belittled," jested Leuw, smil-

ing at her tenderly. "Well, I am willing to make a compromise; let us put it down to capacity judiciously tempered with luck. I don't think any man, whether of our race or any other, who has made some headway, will pretend to anything more. And I certainly see no reason to doubt the luck," he added, the tenderness of his smile deepening as he looked at her.

They had reached the grave, detached from the rest by the foot-high parapet of rail surrounding it. There was a trim, neat look about it, which told Leuw that the ground-keeper had conscientiously earned the yearly stipend he had allowed him. On the headstone gleamed the inscription: "Christopher Donaldson. Unforgettable," as fresh and bright as if it had been lettered there but yesterday. Slowly and reverently Dulcie placed the bunch of daffodils she carried on the grave.

"How glad he must feel that he is not forgotten," she whispered.

Leuw said nothing, but as he took her hand, the thoughts which had stirred him so mightily at Christopher's funeral service came back to him with the full volume and weight of their inner truth. Who knew but that their presence at this lonely grave had brought nearer, by one infinitesimal step, the grace and good accord between man and man, which would rival the imperishable mercy vouchsafed by heaven to earth ever since the time of the very oldest of God's covenants?

THE END